

ORIJIT
SEN

*the RIVER of
STORIES*

K A L P A / V R I K S H



the RIVER of STORIES



Written and illustrated by

ORIJIT SEN

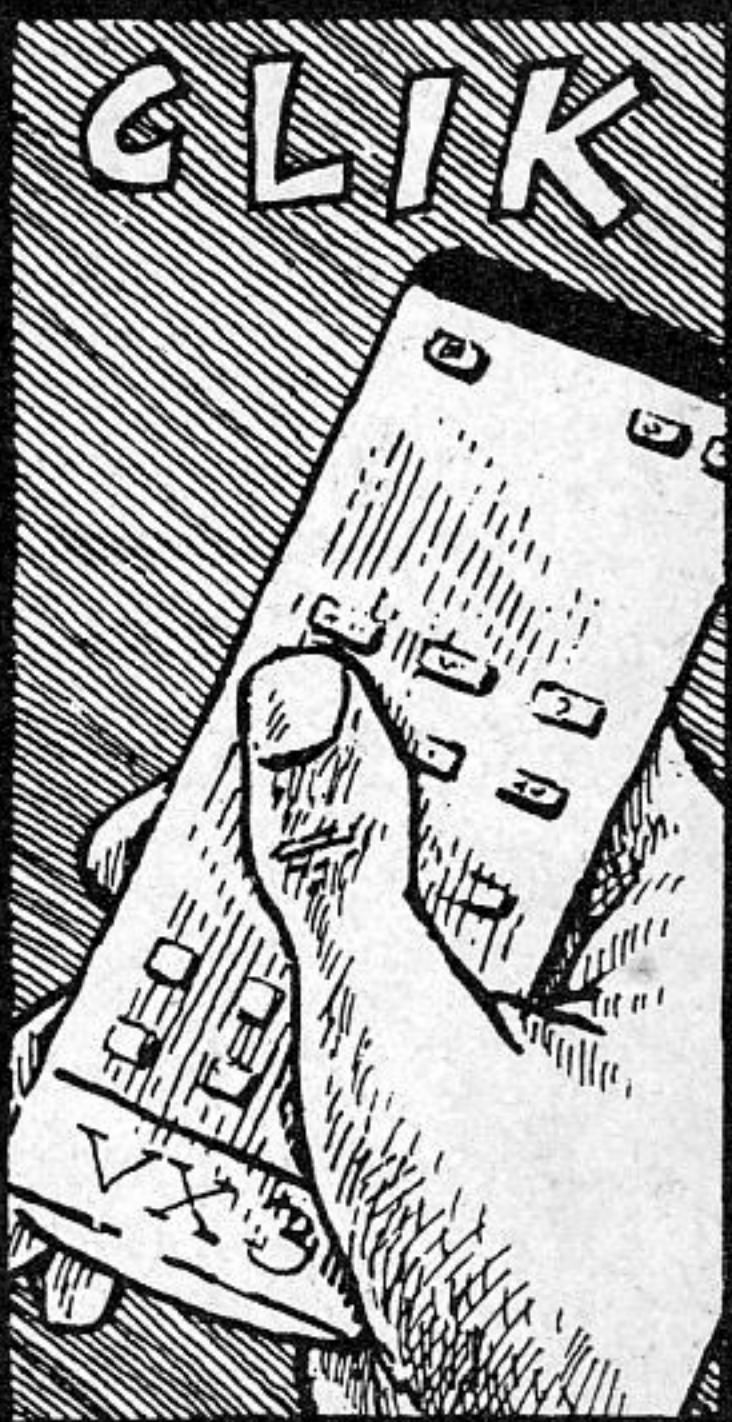
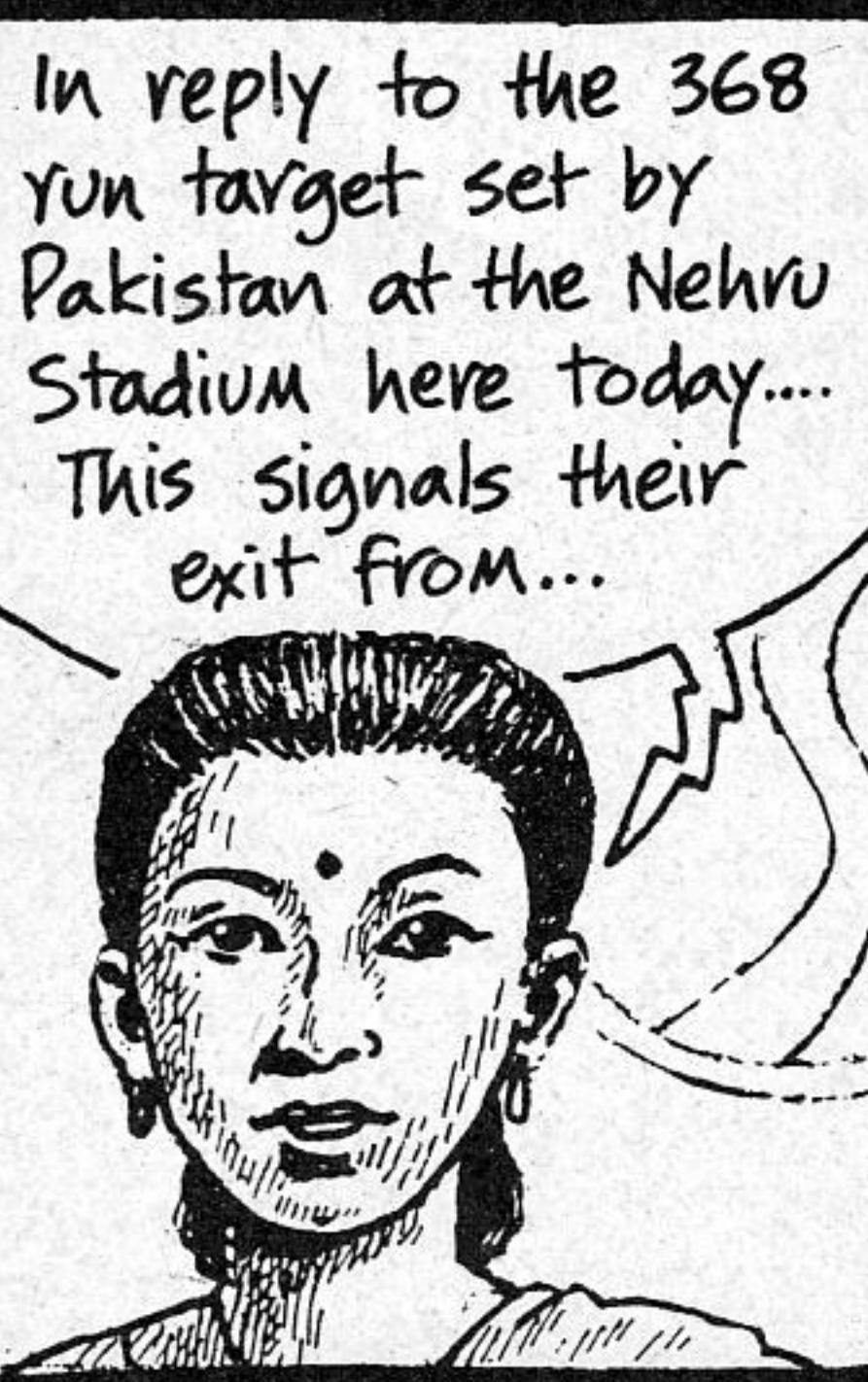
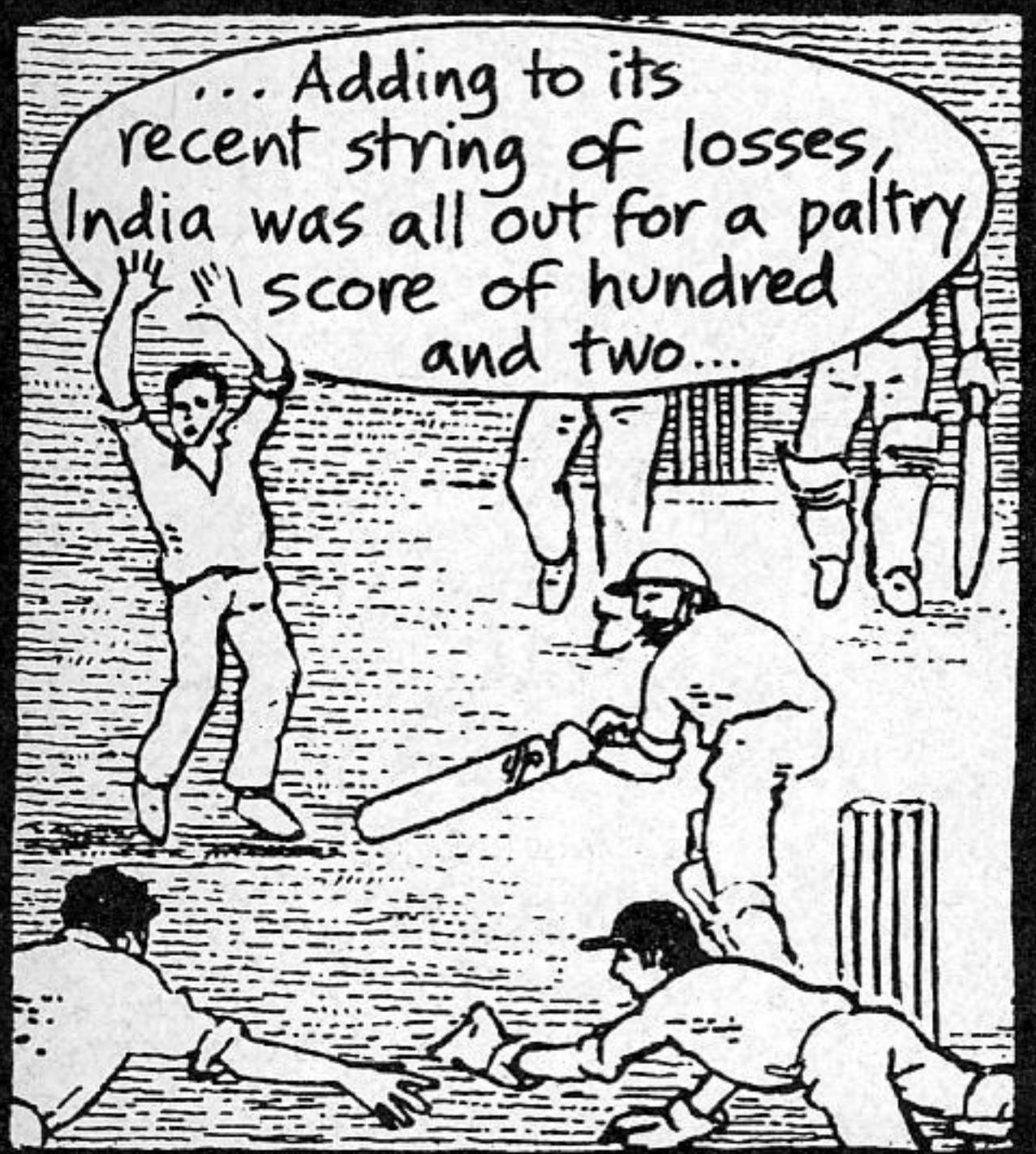
Lettering
AMITA BAVISKAR

K A L P A V R I K S H

New Delhi 1994

Although parts of this narrative are based on real people, places and events, it has been conceived as a work of fiction.

PROLOGUE : A DREAM



Then why, many distraught people have been asking, do we perform so badly at international sports competitions? Indeed, it's so shameful, it's quite ANTI-NATIONAL!

As Minister of sports, I consider it my duty to do something about this sad state of affairs...

So, on this historic occasion, I urge the people of this great country not to despair....

Sh-shala!
Don't finish that.
Leave some for me!

Remember...

... We have a tradition of victory that goes back to the Vedas!

SQUAWK

To carry on this great heritage, we have already drawn up project proposals for the import of sophisticated computers...

GLUG

... which will ensure victories, not only in cricket, but in hockey and football as well!

... You hear zhat, Shoonil?
Shala sharkar hazh a -sh-sholushion for everything!

... Hmf.. Except us.

Thass right!
Sho what if we're a problem? At least we're insoluble!

We have met all the IMF conditionalities, and many foreign agencies are keen to give us aid for this multi-million dollar project!

What rubbish!

I heard that, young man!

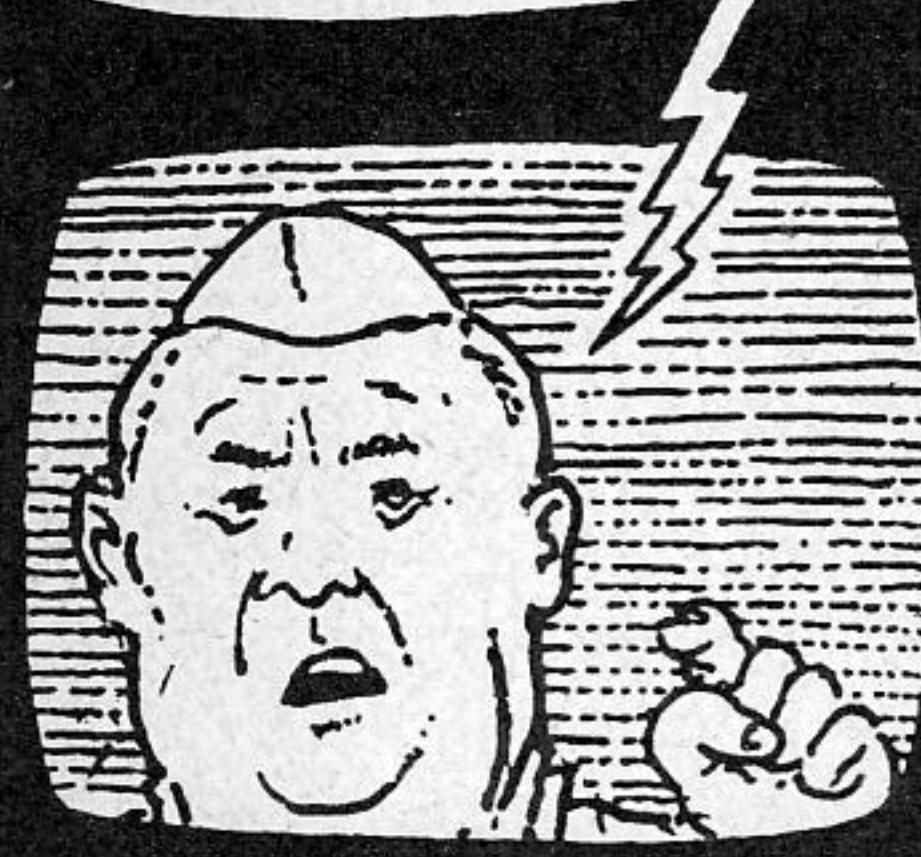
Wha... such dismissive remarks being made about matters of national importance - especially when they are made by misguided socialists like you!

Me? A socialist?

A useless sociology graduate, in any case! What do you know about running the nation?

Today, we are a backward country because of people like you - who don't understand progress!

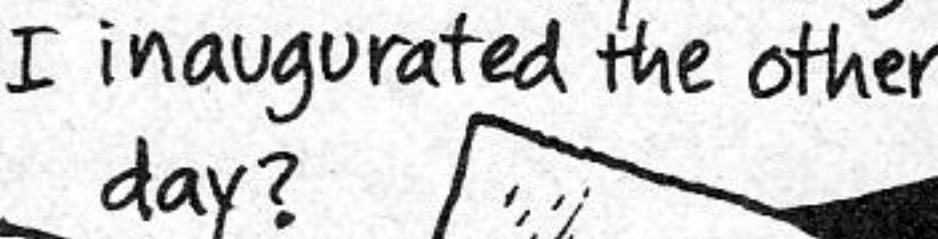
Unfortunately for you, we have already entered the fast track of development. There is no stopping us now, as we plunge headlong into the twenty first century!



Think of it! We have sent up satellites into space, established research stations on Antarctica. We are building the largest dams, the latest nuclear reactors...

We are revolutionizing agriculture, we...

Not the Barbie doll manufacturing plant, you idiot! ... What? ... Yes, that's it! Say that again?

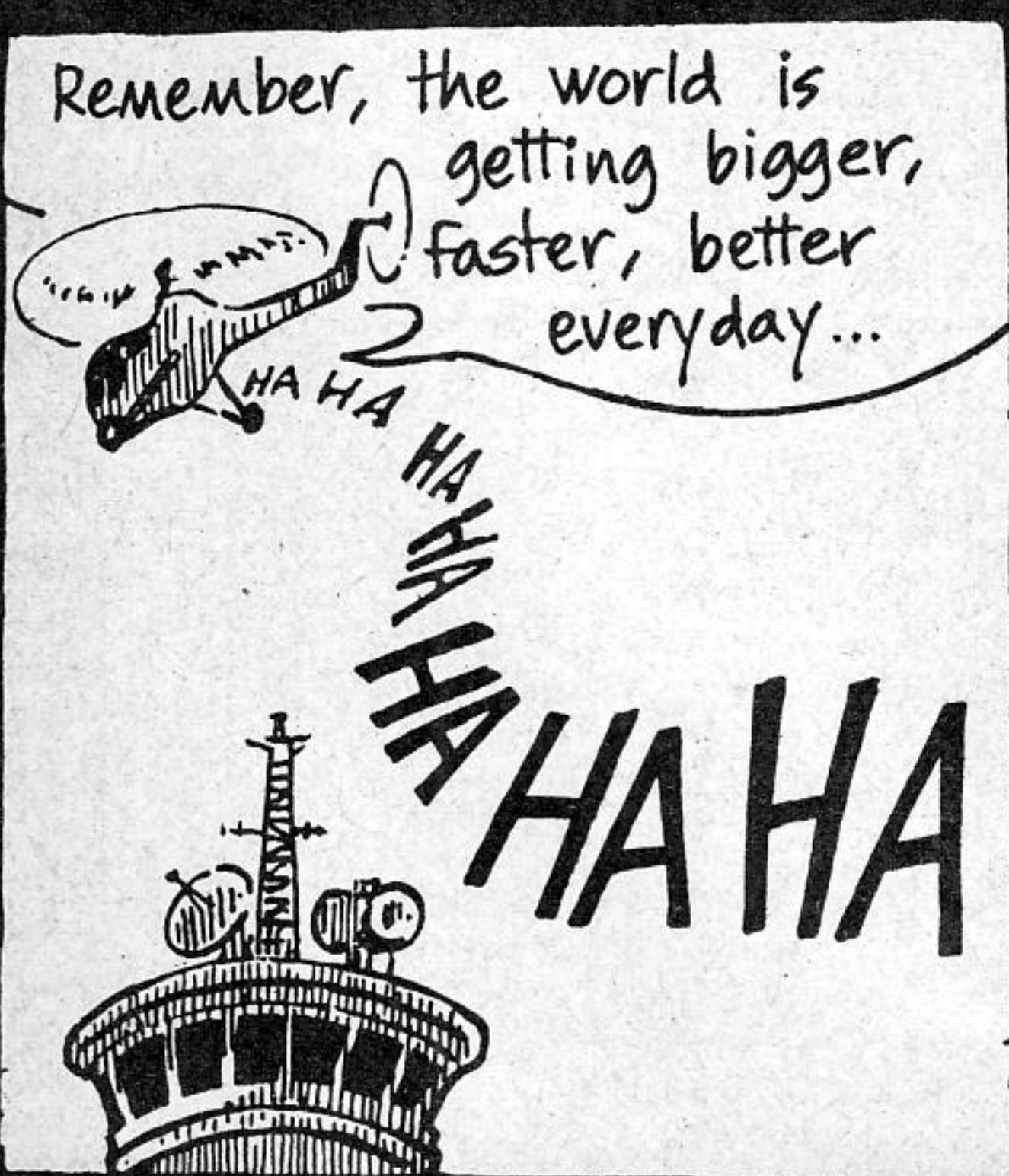
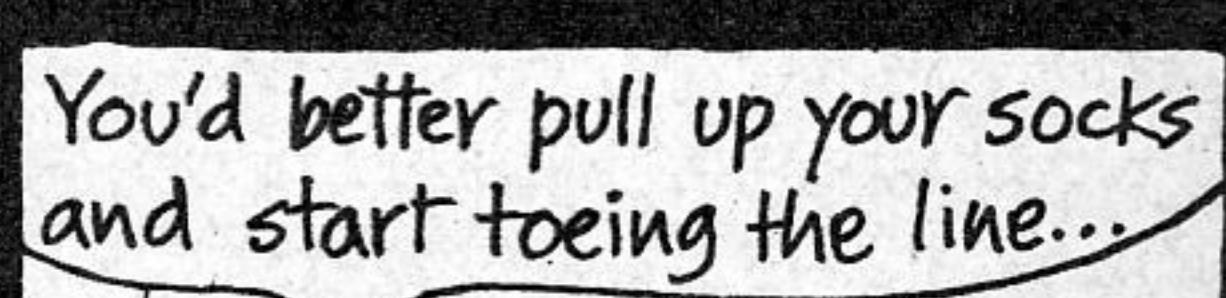
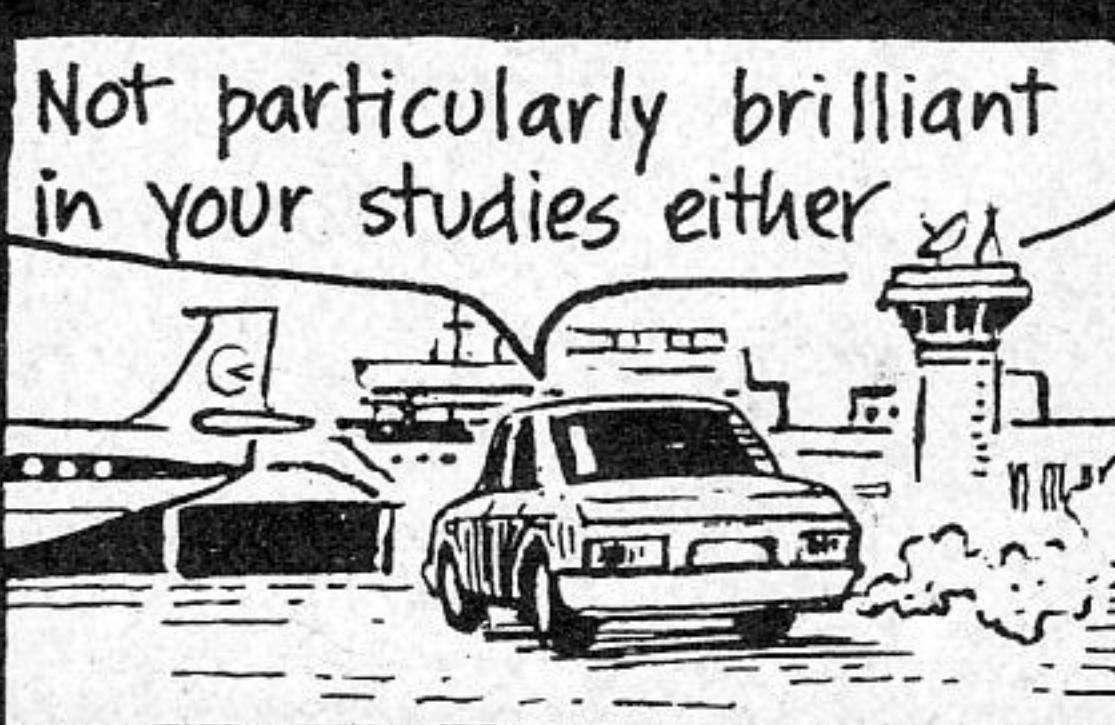
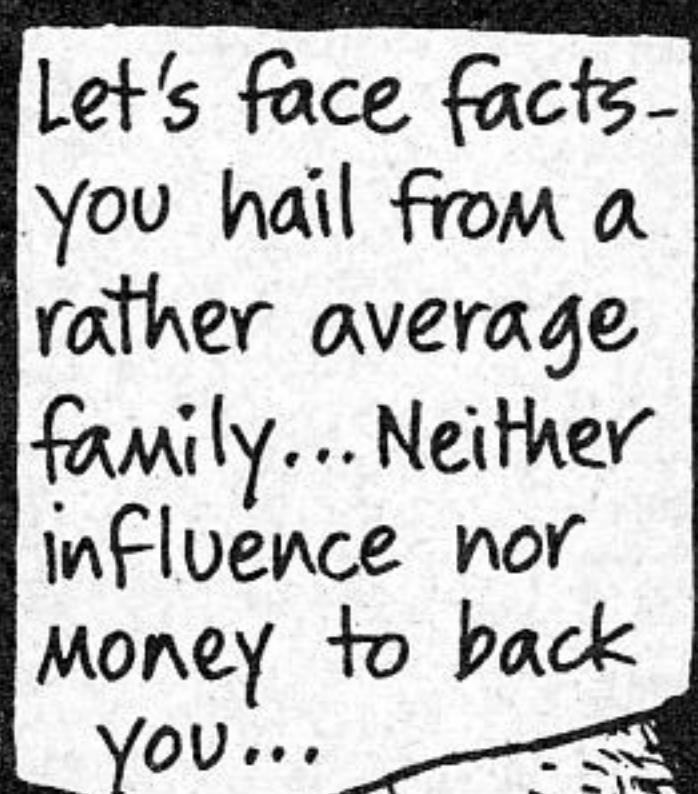
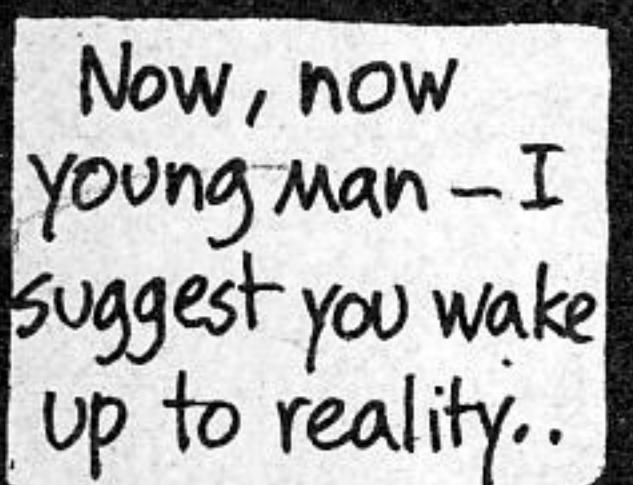
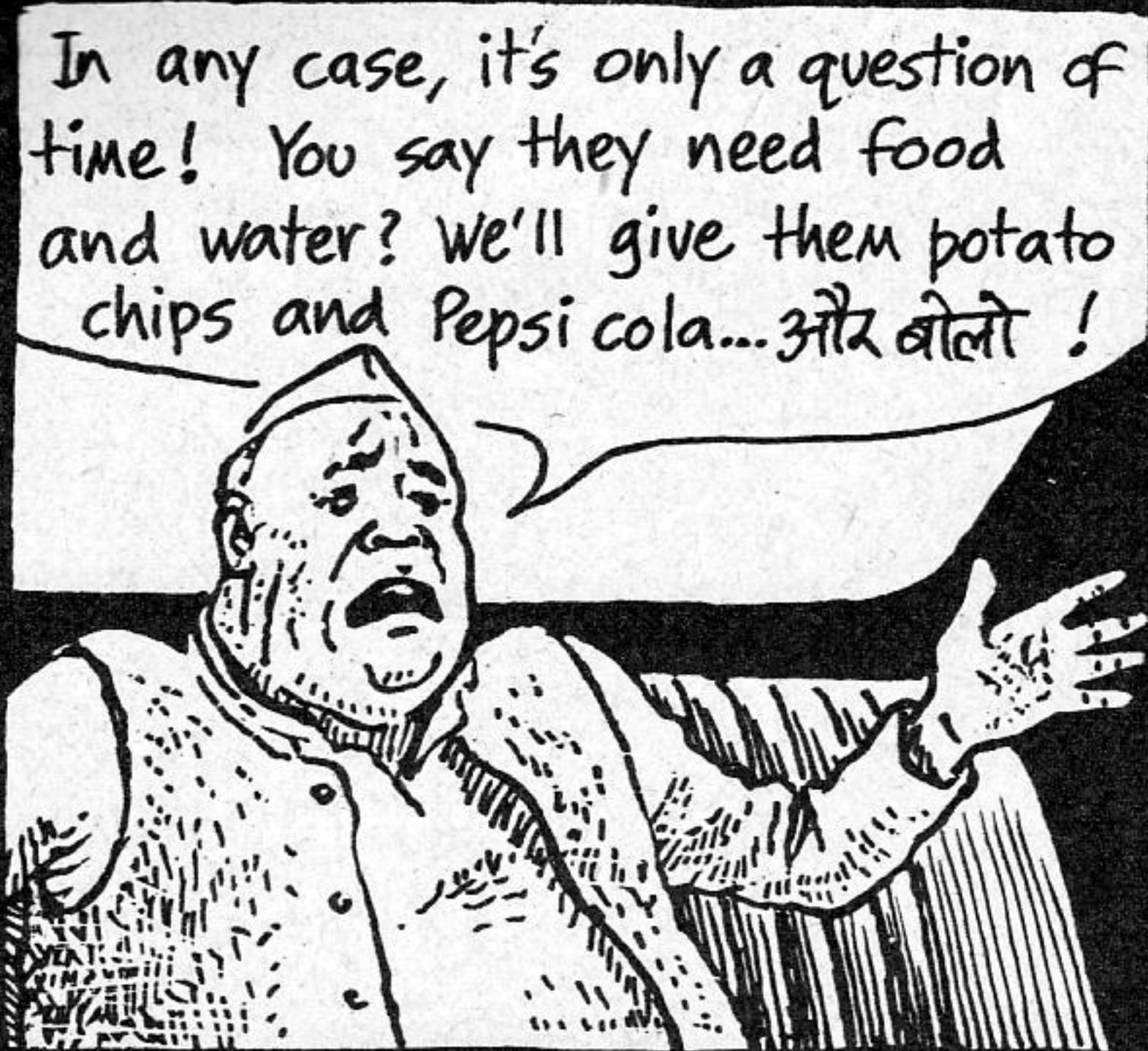
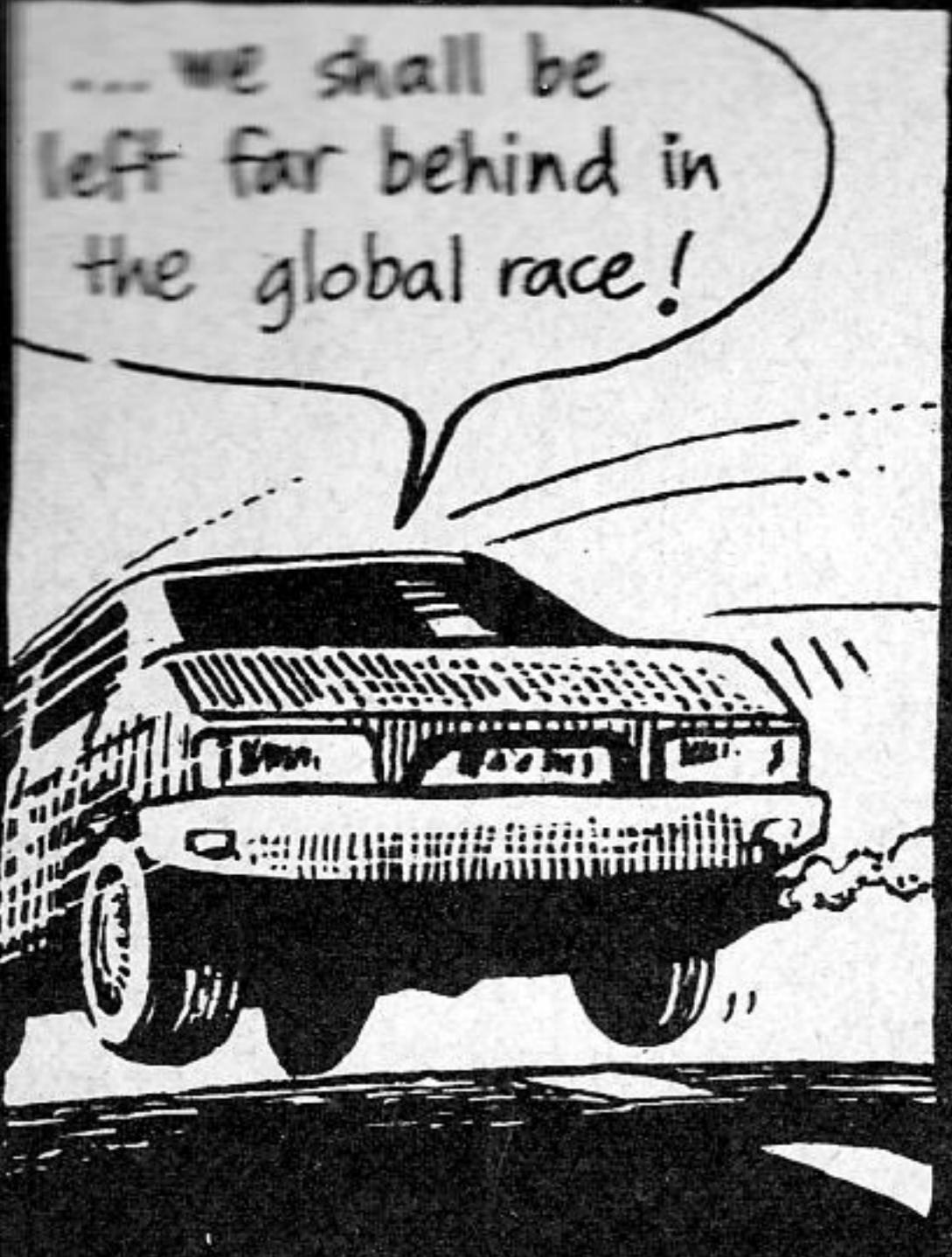


Very impressive! But then I keep hearing of people who are hungry, jobless... illiterate..

Don't they get to have any of the goodies?

It's all a matter of national priorities, friend. If we wait for every adivasi to leave the jungle and adopt a civilized way of life...





This is the story of a river.....

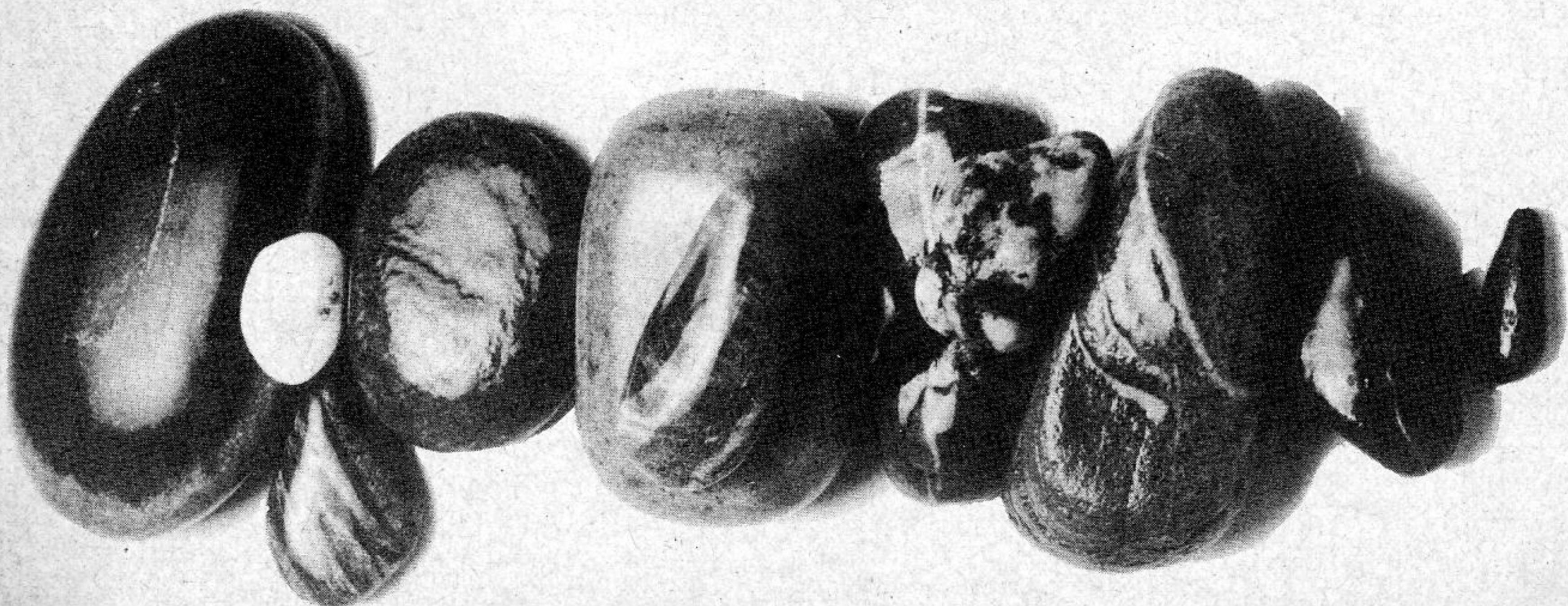
But a story itself is a river. A river that welled up from the underground of human consciousness, and flowed over the slopes and plains of human memory; twisting, meandering, almost as if trying to trace the million different contours of the words with which it was formed.

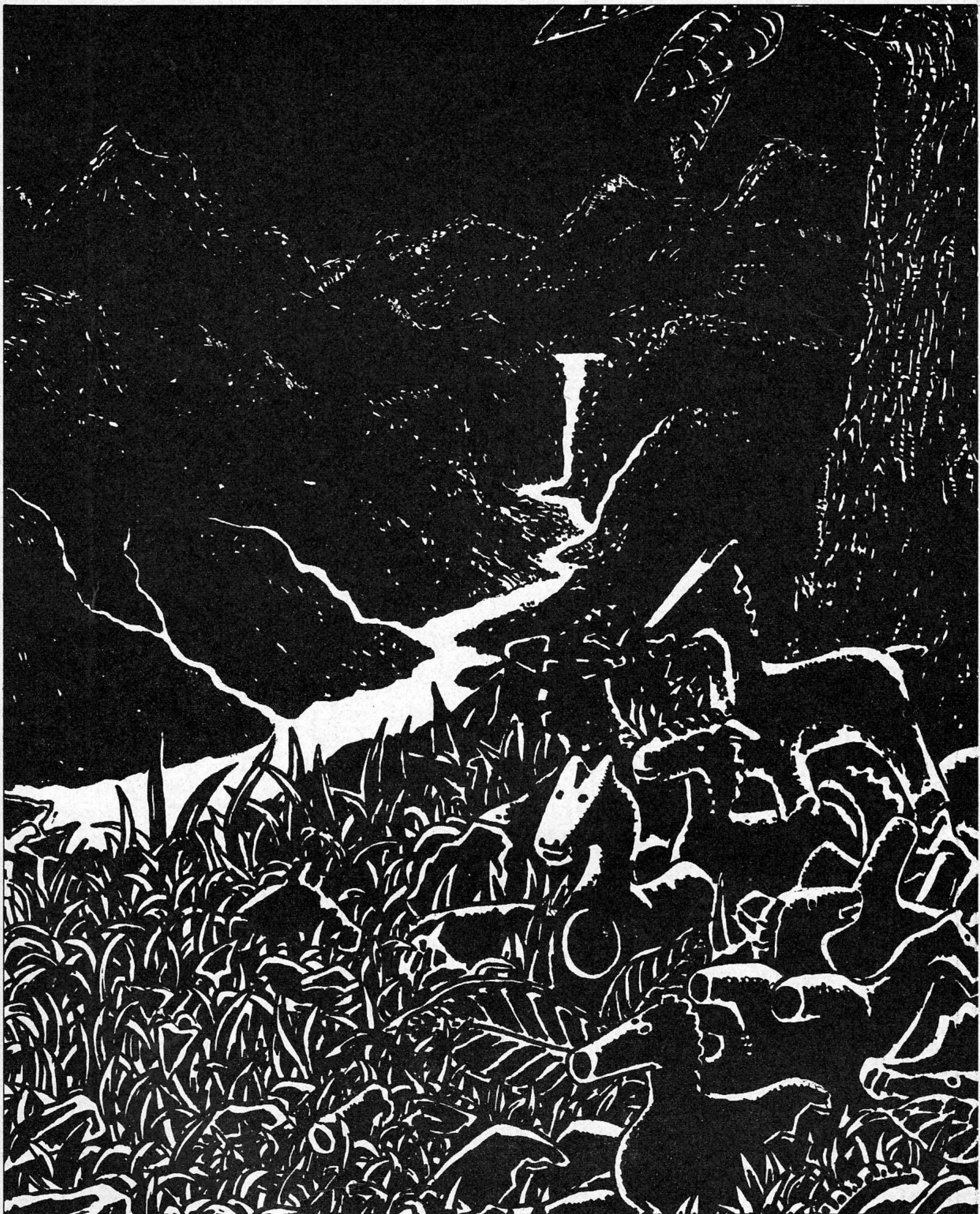
Endlessly moulding the terrains of experience and skill (which is just memory made physical) it carved mighty valleys in which civilizations could take birth and flower, drawing nourishment from its life giving waters.

Generation after generation, the river has constantly replenished itself with new meanings, contemporary symbols... and all this it has taken, generation after generation, to that infinite sea we call external reality (which is beyond comprehension or explanation). And yet, for all of humanity it has been the only way to interpret and give meaning to the cosmos.

If there were no rivers, perhaps there would have been no human society.

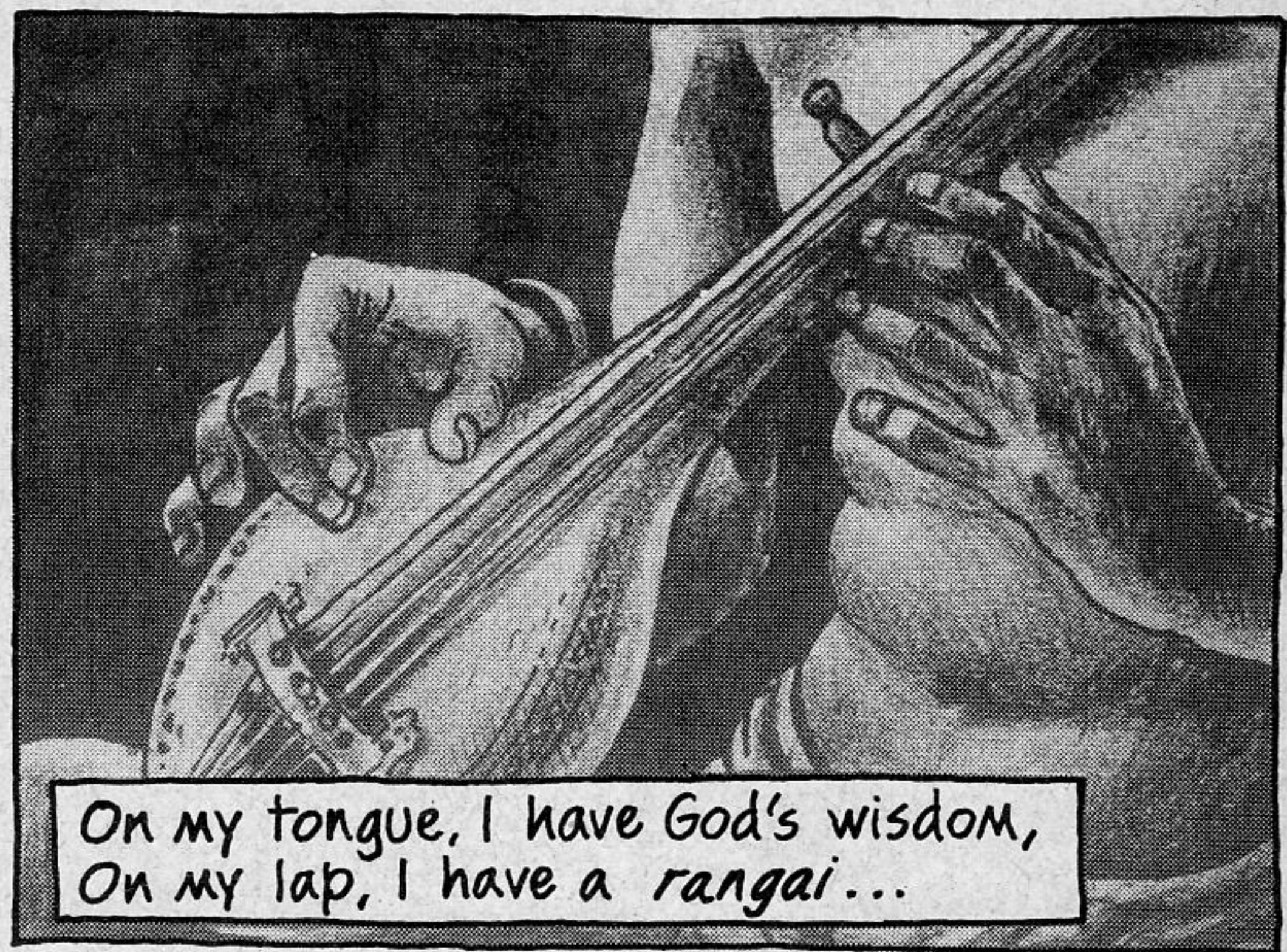
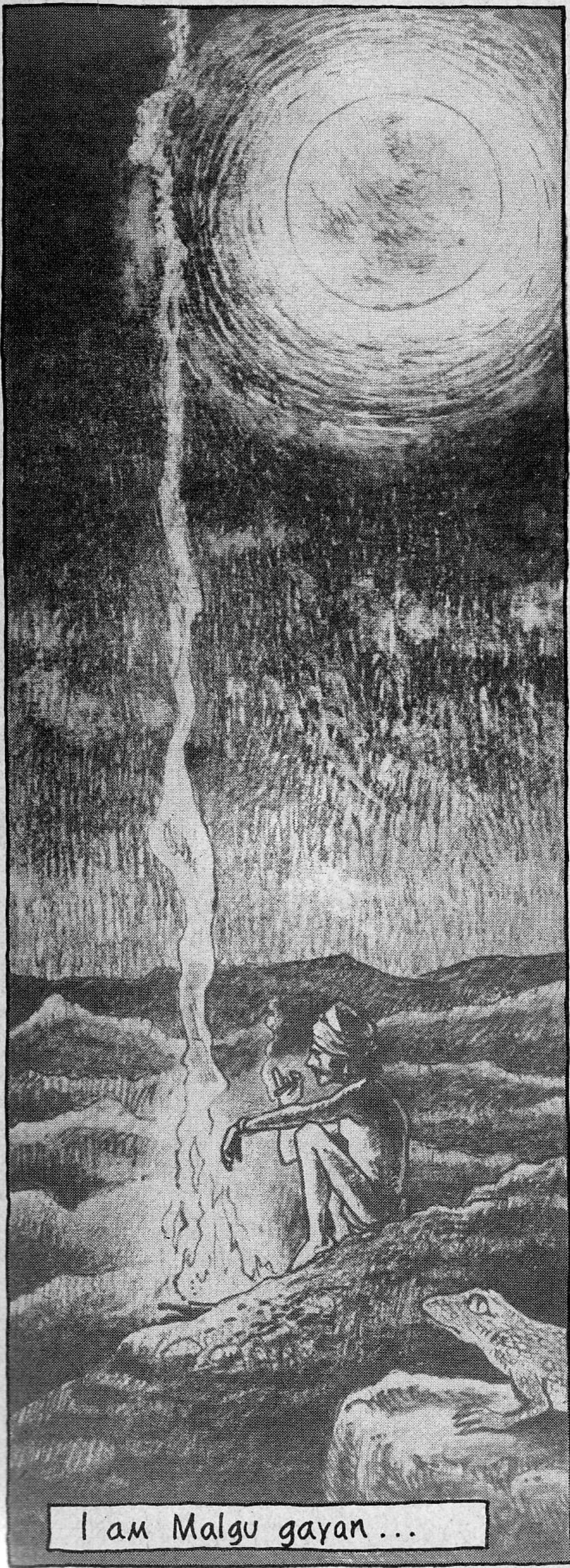
To begin at the beginning then, is to journey to the river's source — to the story of the 'original inhabitant'... the adi-vasi.

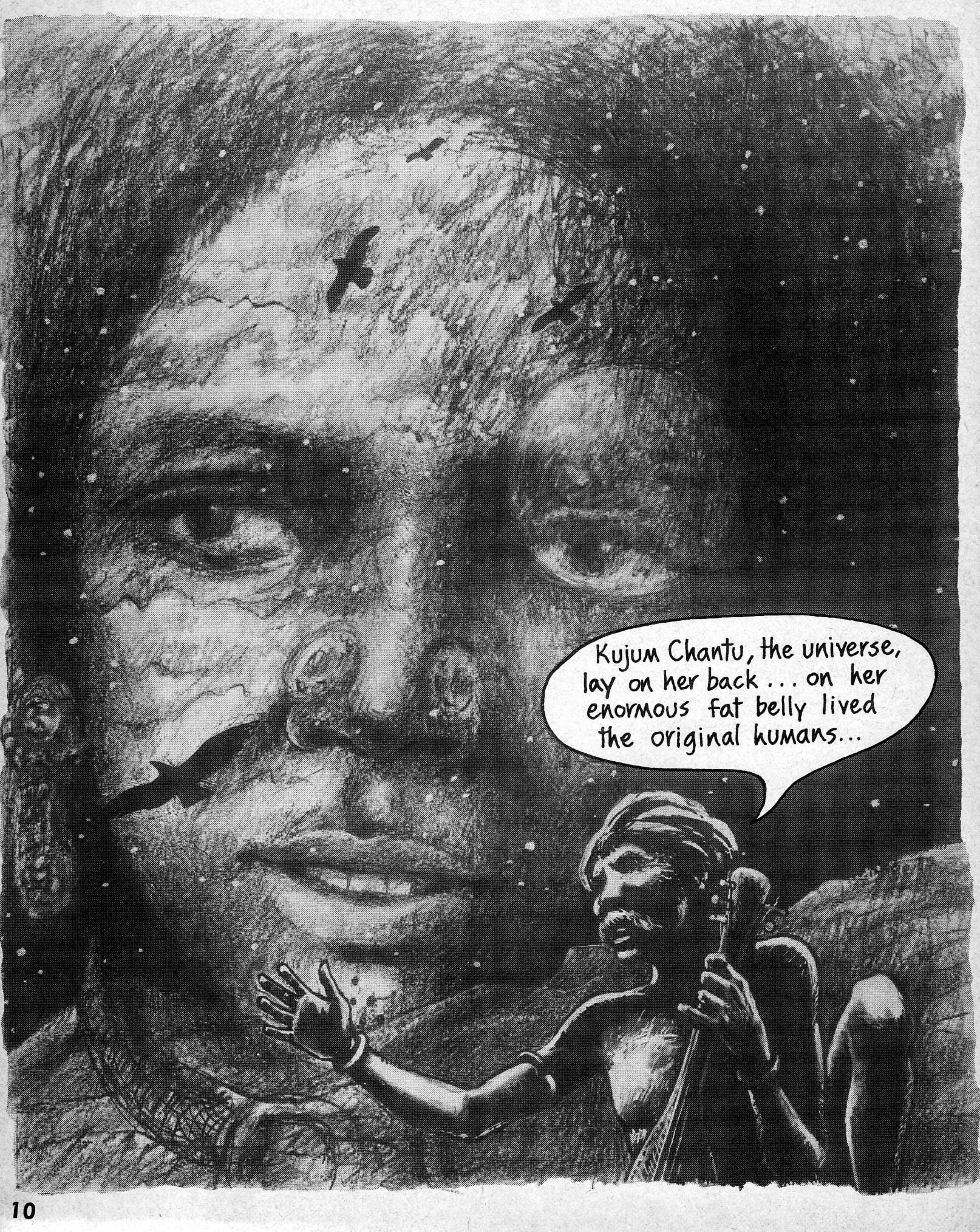




Part I : THE SPRING

KUJUM CHANTU





Kujum Chantu, the universe,
lay on her back ... on her
enormous fat belly lived
the original humans...

..One day, it occurred to KUJUM Chantu that if she ever got up and walked about, everyone would fall off and be killed.



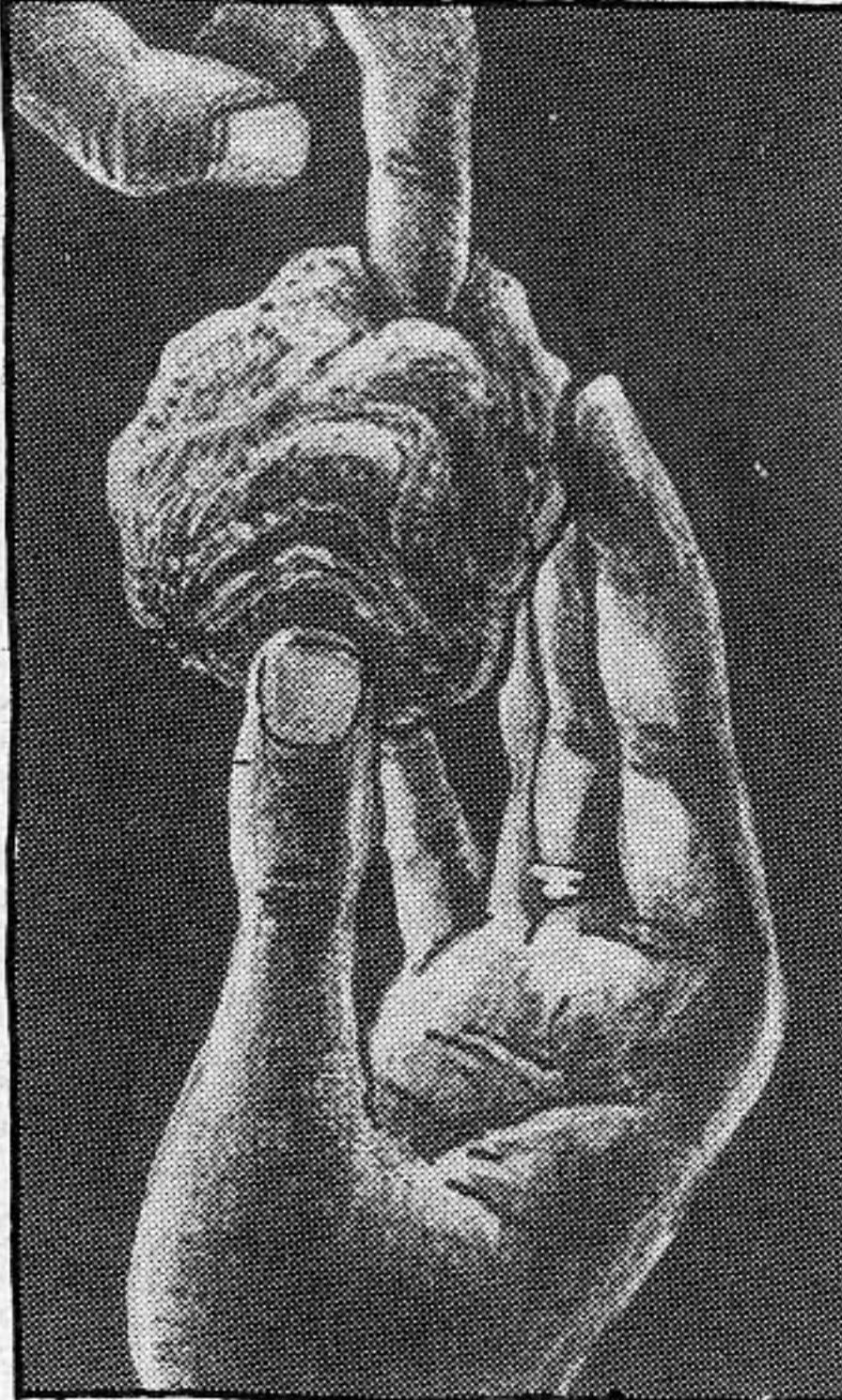
She decided to make a world for humans to live on...



..rubbed some dirt off her chest and shaped it. Kneaded it, squeezed it, and patted it...



...Made a world full of bits and holes, projections and distortions...



Smooth in some places, rough in others, and held it in the palm of her hand, well pleased...



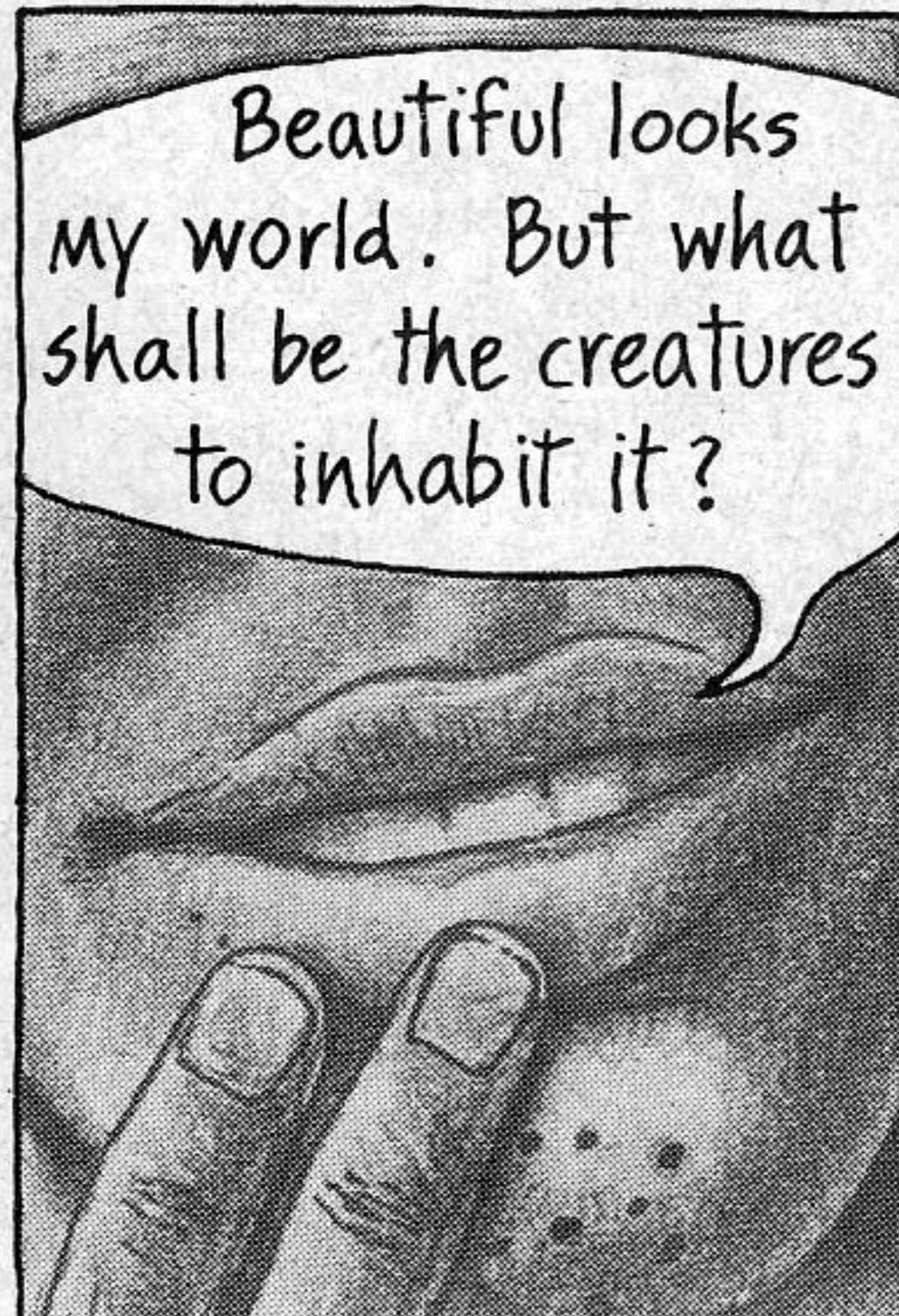
I have made the world, but it's barren. How shall I give it life?



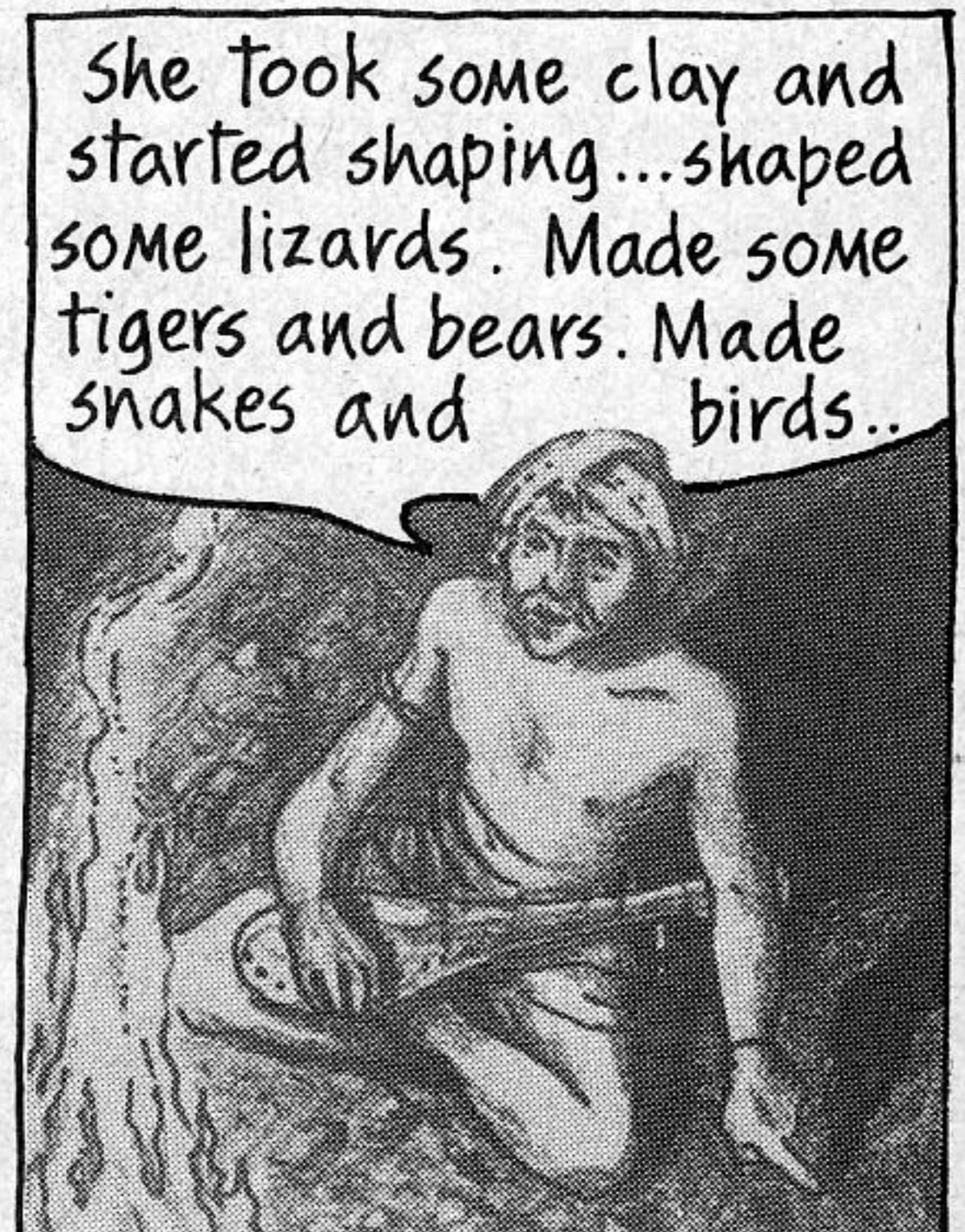
So she made trees, shrubs and grasses and planted them!



Beautiful looks my world. But what shall be the creatures to inhabit it?



She took some clay and started shaping...shaped some lizards. Made some tigers and bears. Made snakes and birds..

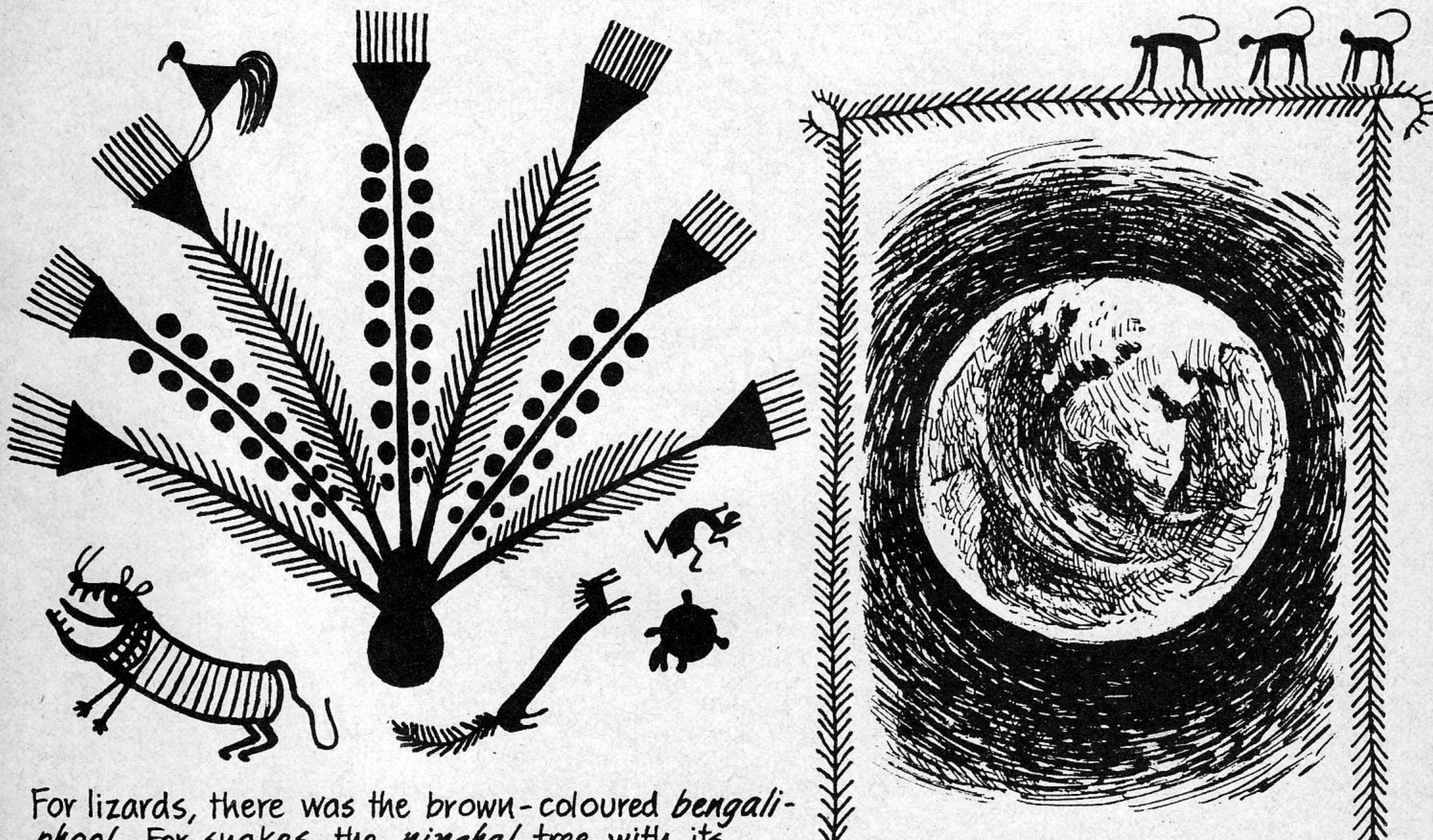


...All kinds of creatures she shaped. To put blood into all of them, she planted a garden....



..Part of this garden was for us humans.

This was the garden of *juvar*. She gave breasts to the *juvar*. This is why if we don't eat *juvar*, our blood dries up. For livestock, there was the garden of *jinjivi* grass. She gave it breasts too. So the livestock also came to have blood.

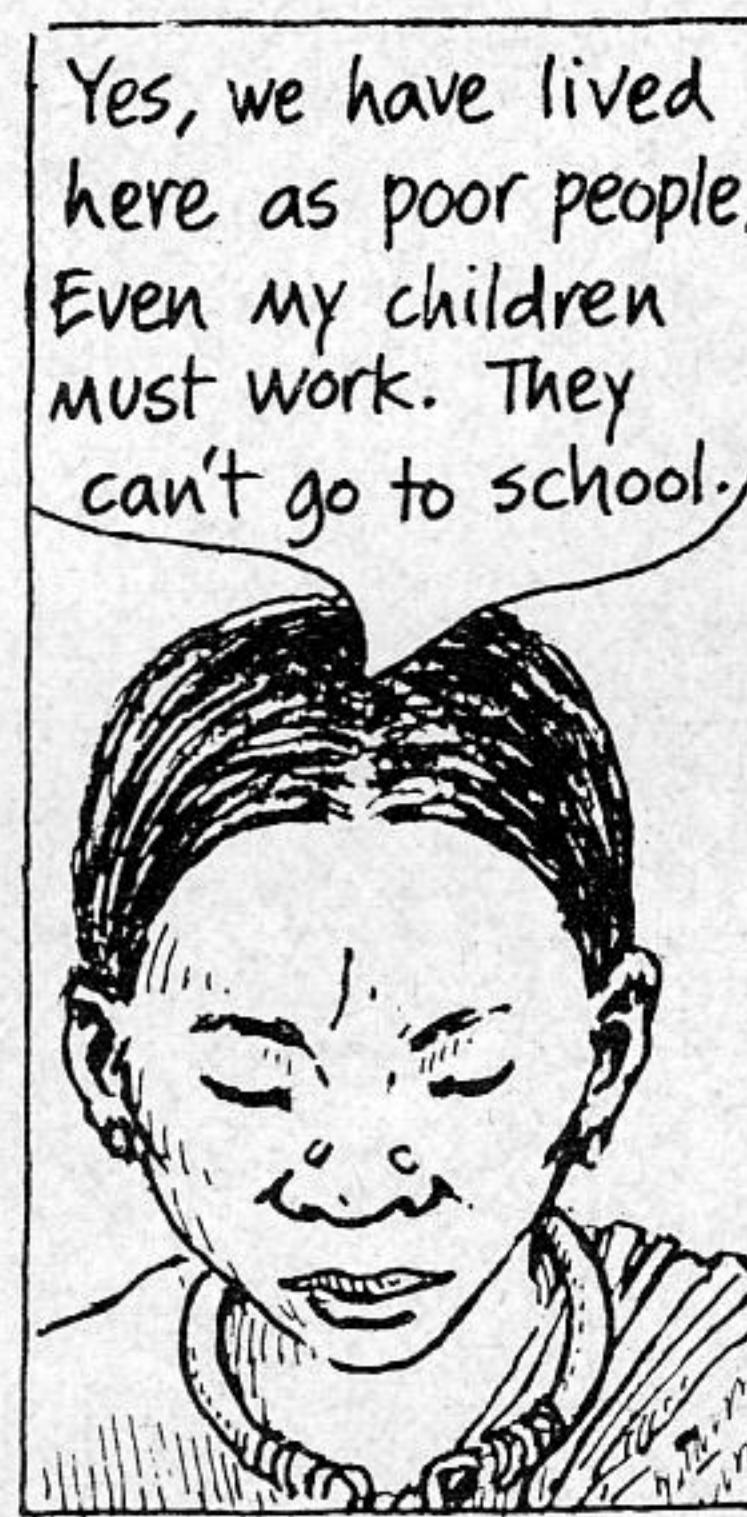
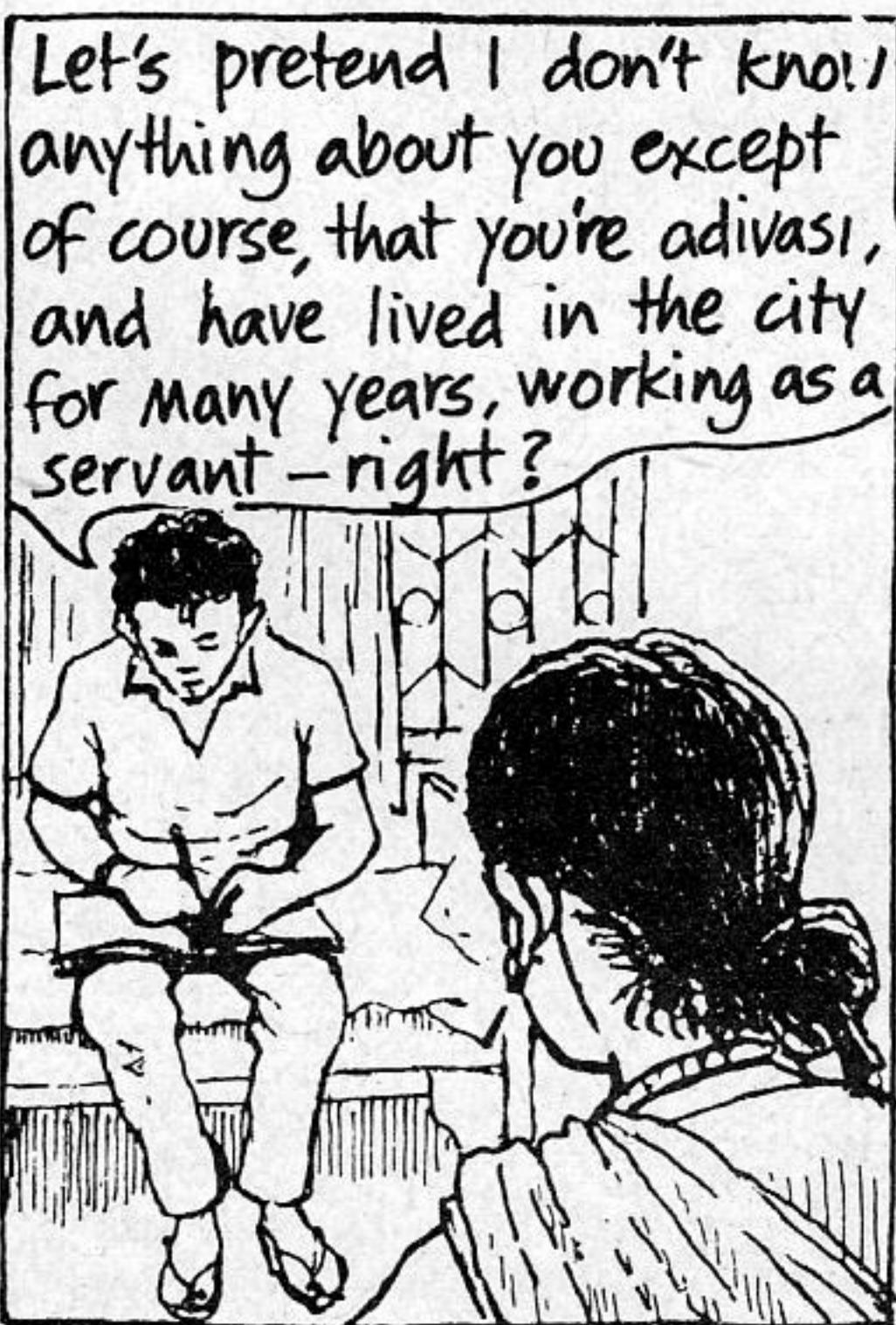
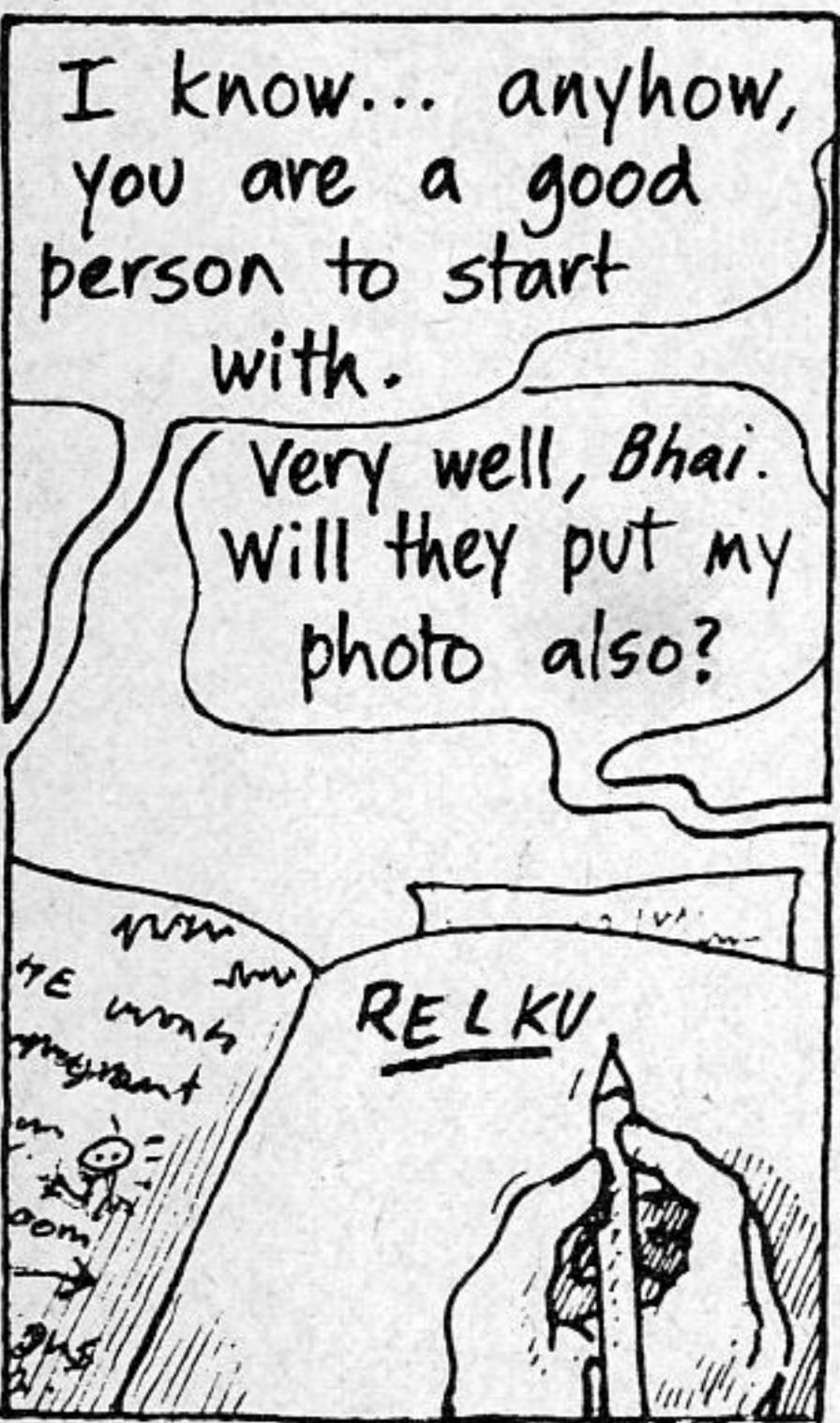
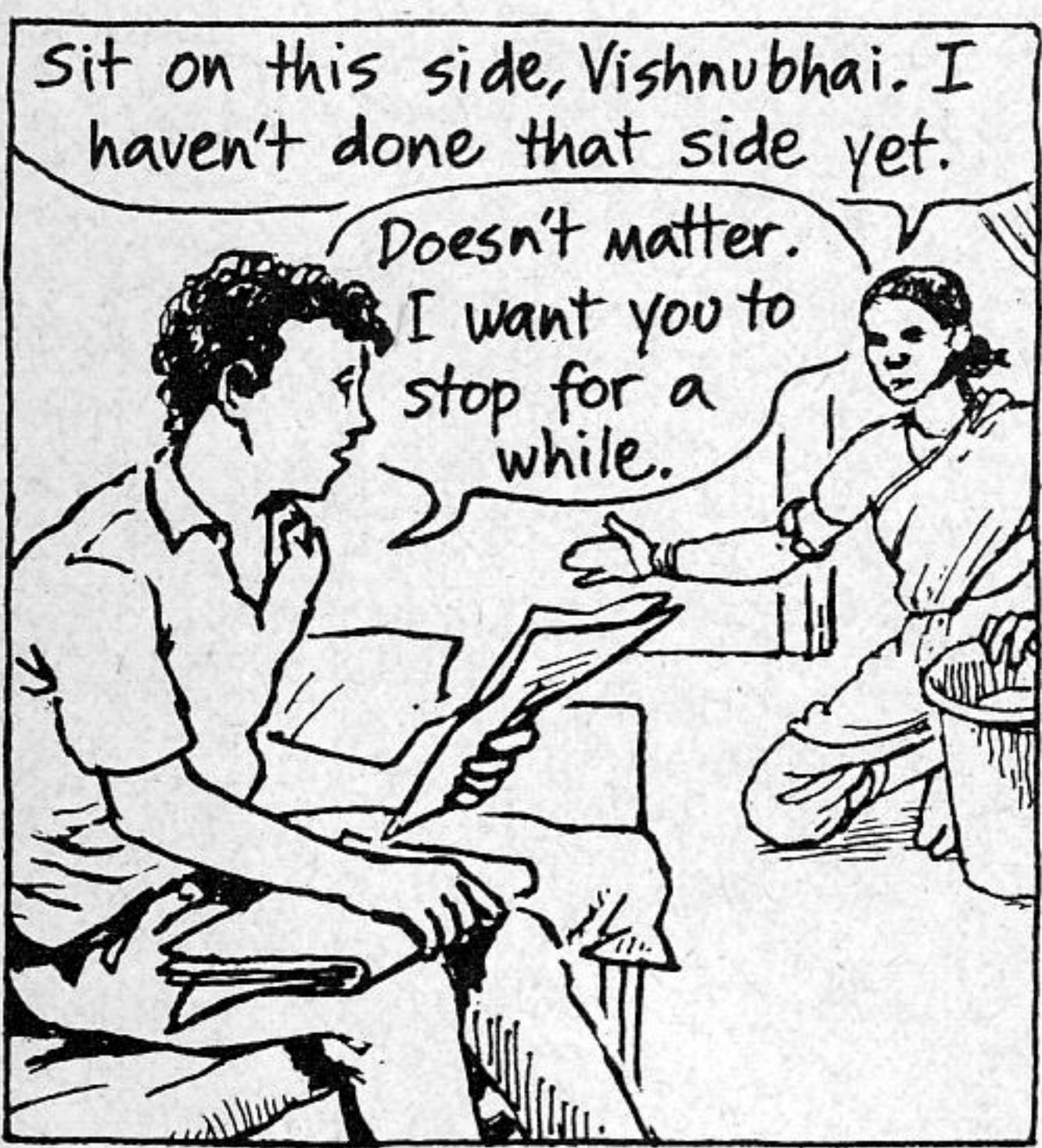
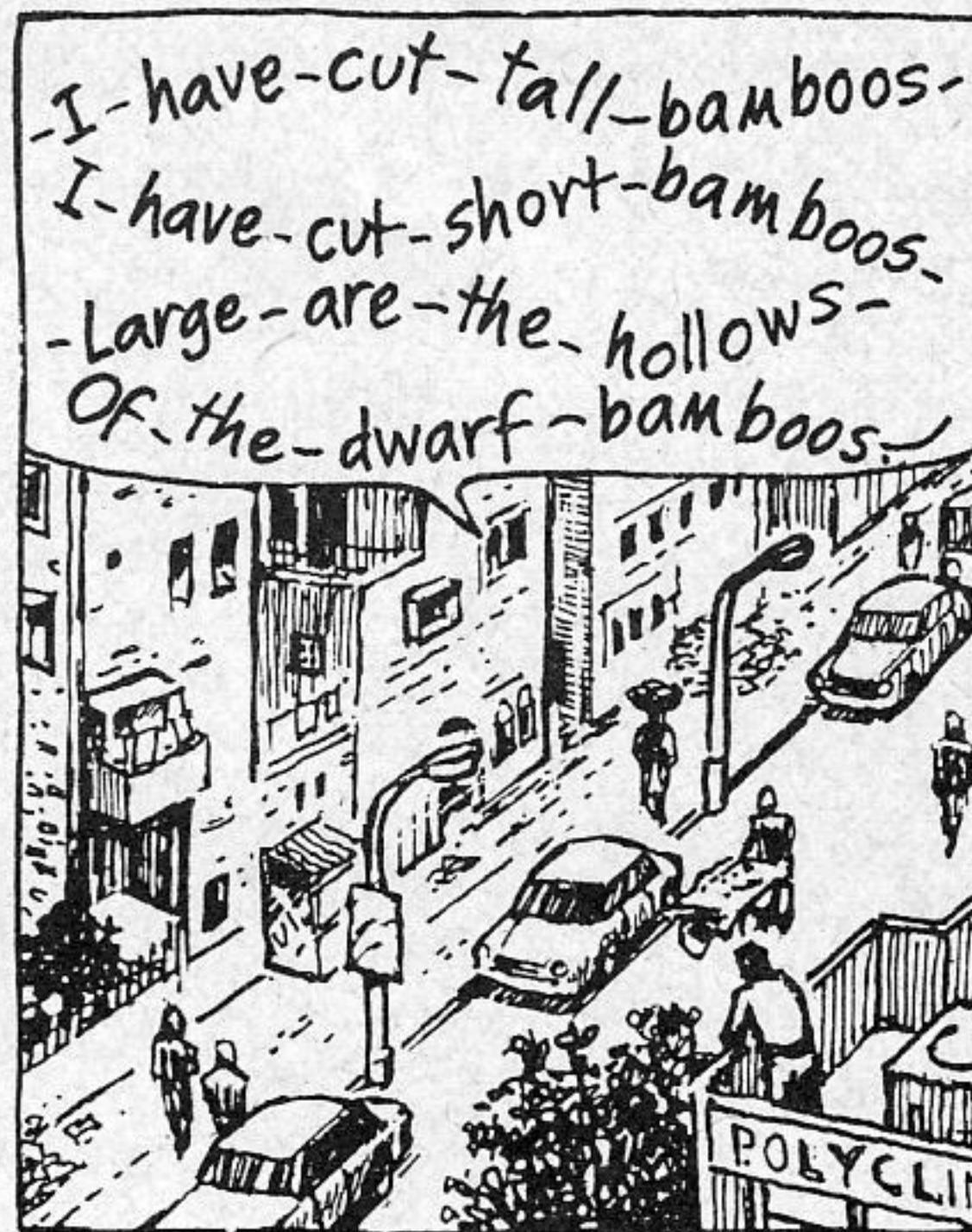


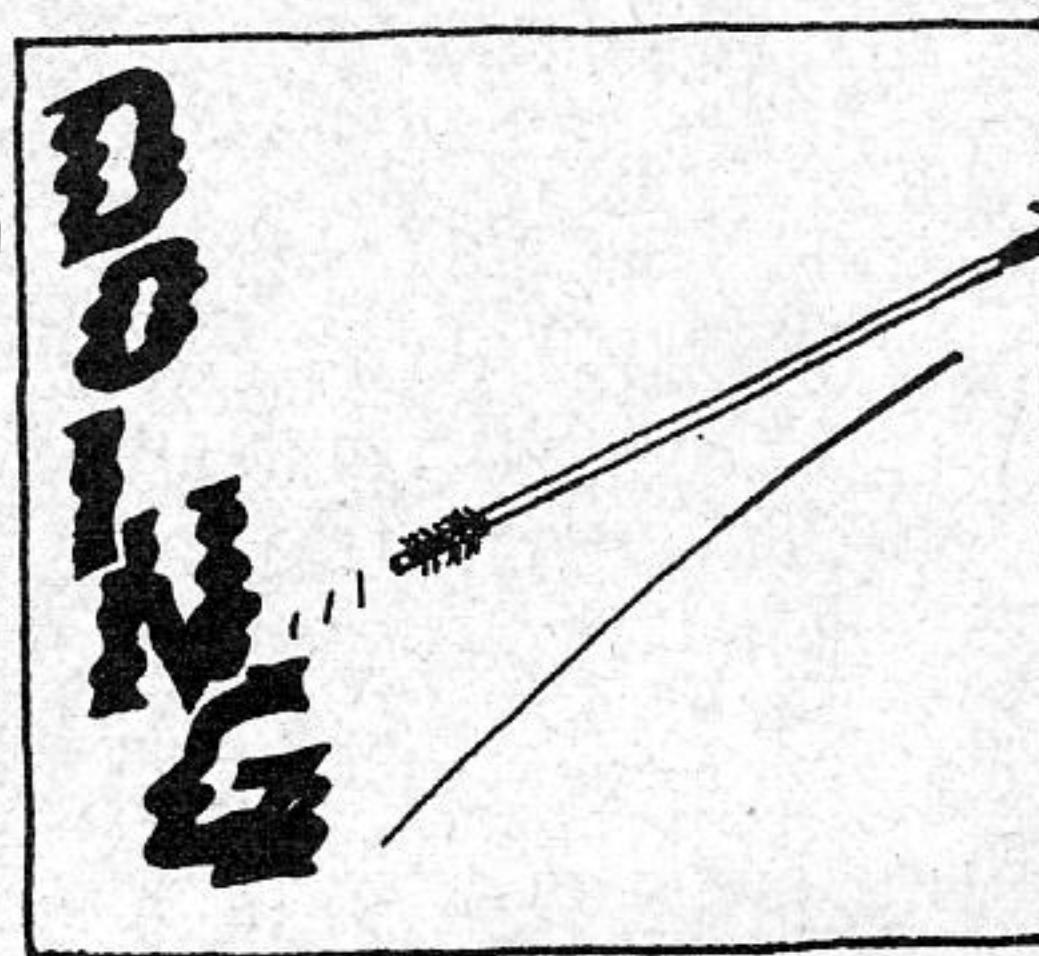
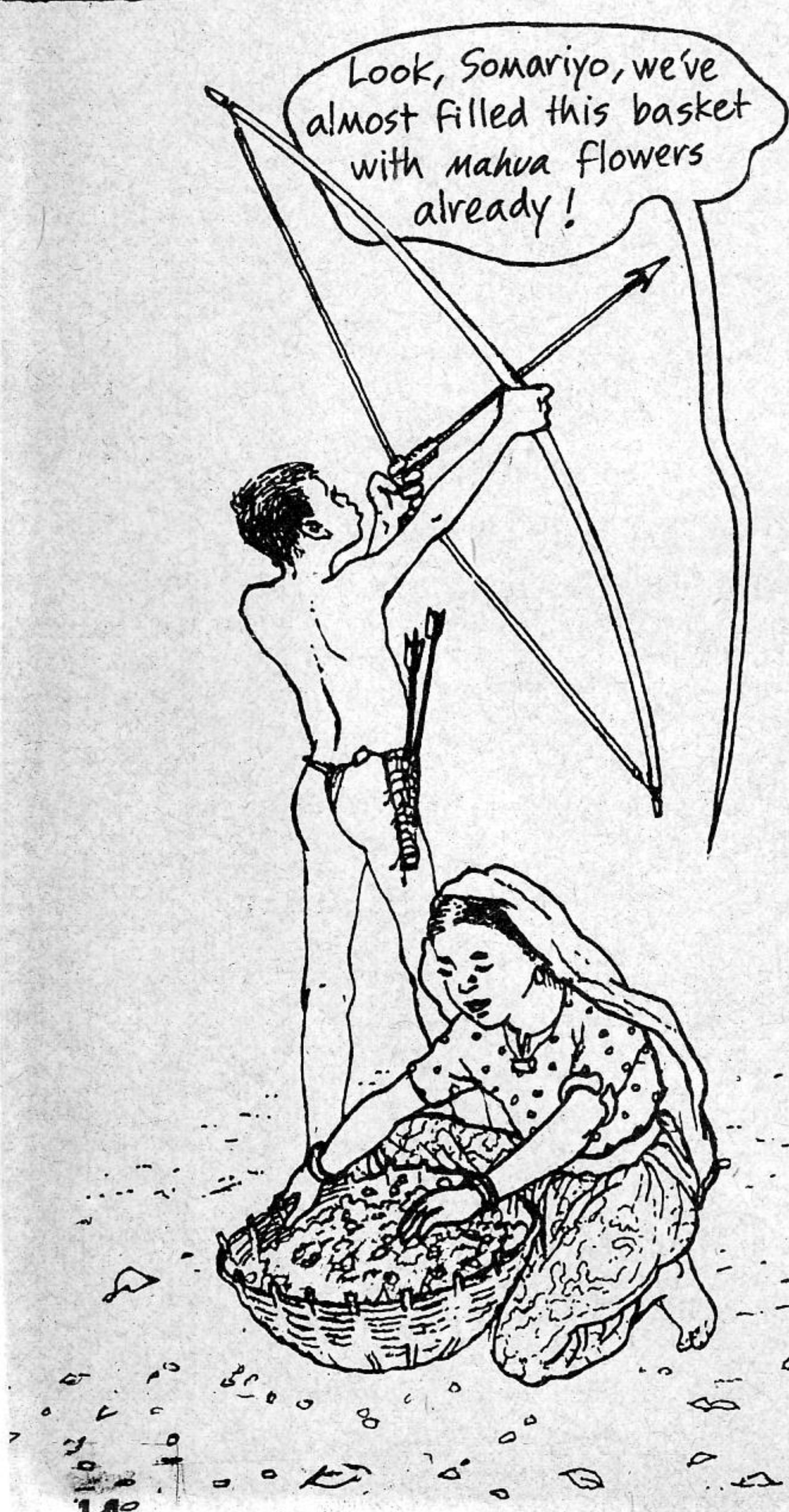
For lizards, there was the brown-coloured *bengali-phool*. For snakes, the *ningha* tree with its poisonous flowers of blue and yellow...

And so, the entire world, with all its creatures, with enough food in it for all, she created.



RELKU'S STORY





CR-REAK

CRAK!

These damned tribals always choose the most inaccessible places for their settlements.

RR .. RRRR .. R

FOREST DEPT.

I tell you, Datta, no development can happen here till the road is made and good communications set up.

I absolutely agree, sir.

The very existence of people living in such a primitive way is an obstacle for modernizing the country.

Who are they, Somariyo?

They look like big sarkari people from Ballanpur...

Quick! They looked like they were going to our pada. Let's go see.

... I am told that despite repeated warnings, you people have been cultivating land, grazing your cattle, taking wood and hunting on forest land which belongs to the sarkar.



As you must be well aware, the government declared this area a reserve forest several years ago. That means it belongs to the forest department.



And whoever uses it in any way without permission will be punished!



Sahib, These hills and forests are our home! We were all born here - our ancestors have lived here and after us our children.....



No! The time has come for all this nonsense to stop. You people have to give up thinking of the forests as your private property to use as you please



I don't understand this. What has this got to do with the sarkar? And how is it possible to live without farming or hunting?



Sahib, This land is our Mata. She gives us food and shelter. She takes care of our needs. We worship the trees, the river, the hills....



Now listen! No one expects you to live without food. But you must realize that times have changed. You can't go on living the way your ancestors used to.



The sarkar is trying to do a lot of development work in this area. All of you can benefit from these schemes, provided you learn to cooperate!



Already work on the pucca road from Ballapur to Mathwa has started. It will pass through here...

... That means there will be proper means of transport available... so that, little by little, these jungles can be opened up. Proper houses, even factories can be built. Do you even understand what all this means?

Yes, sahib.

Yes.

Yes, sahib.

Really? Then don't just sit there like a bunch of idiots, nodding your heads. Tell me what it will mean!

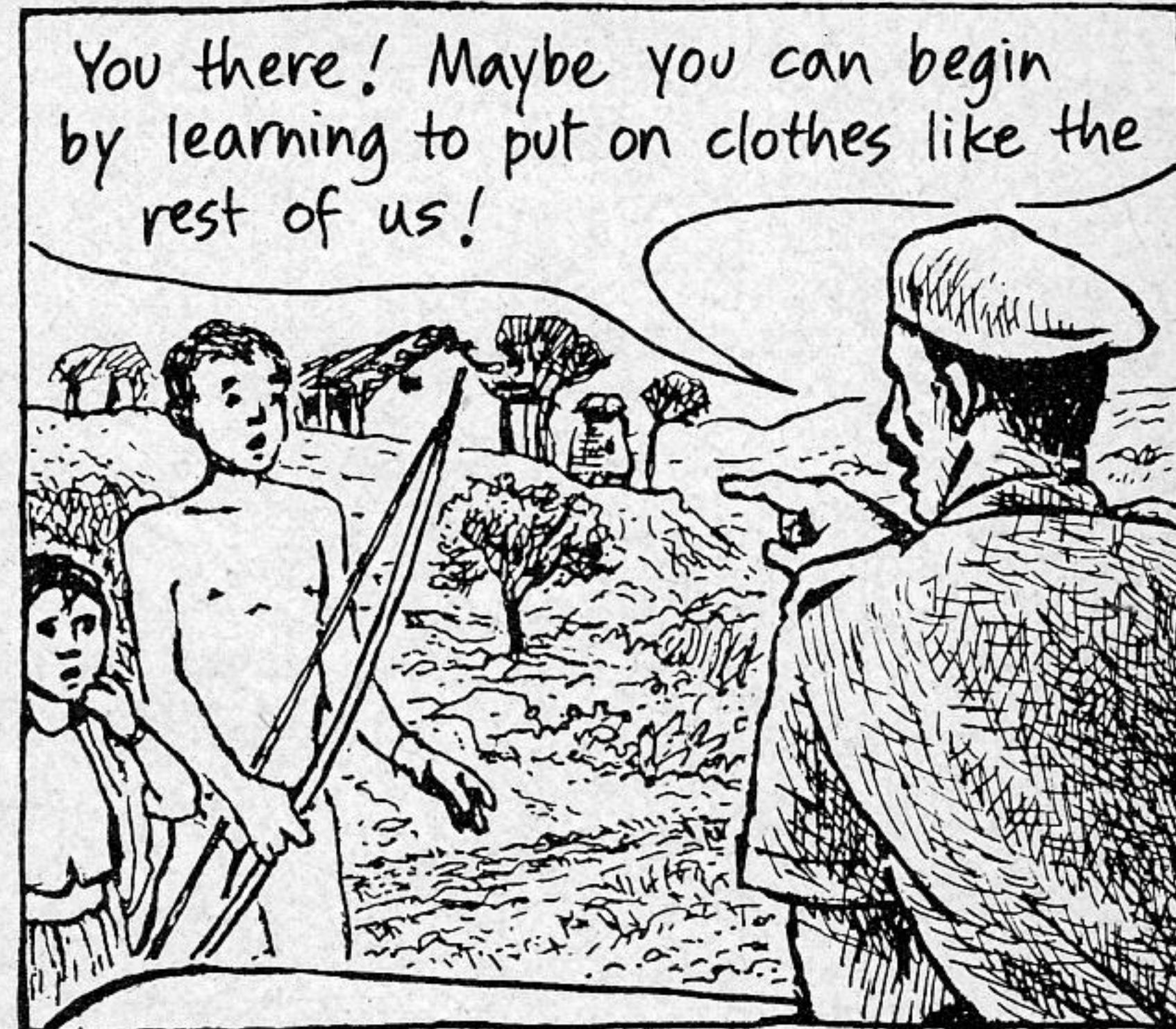
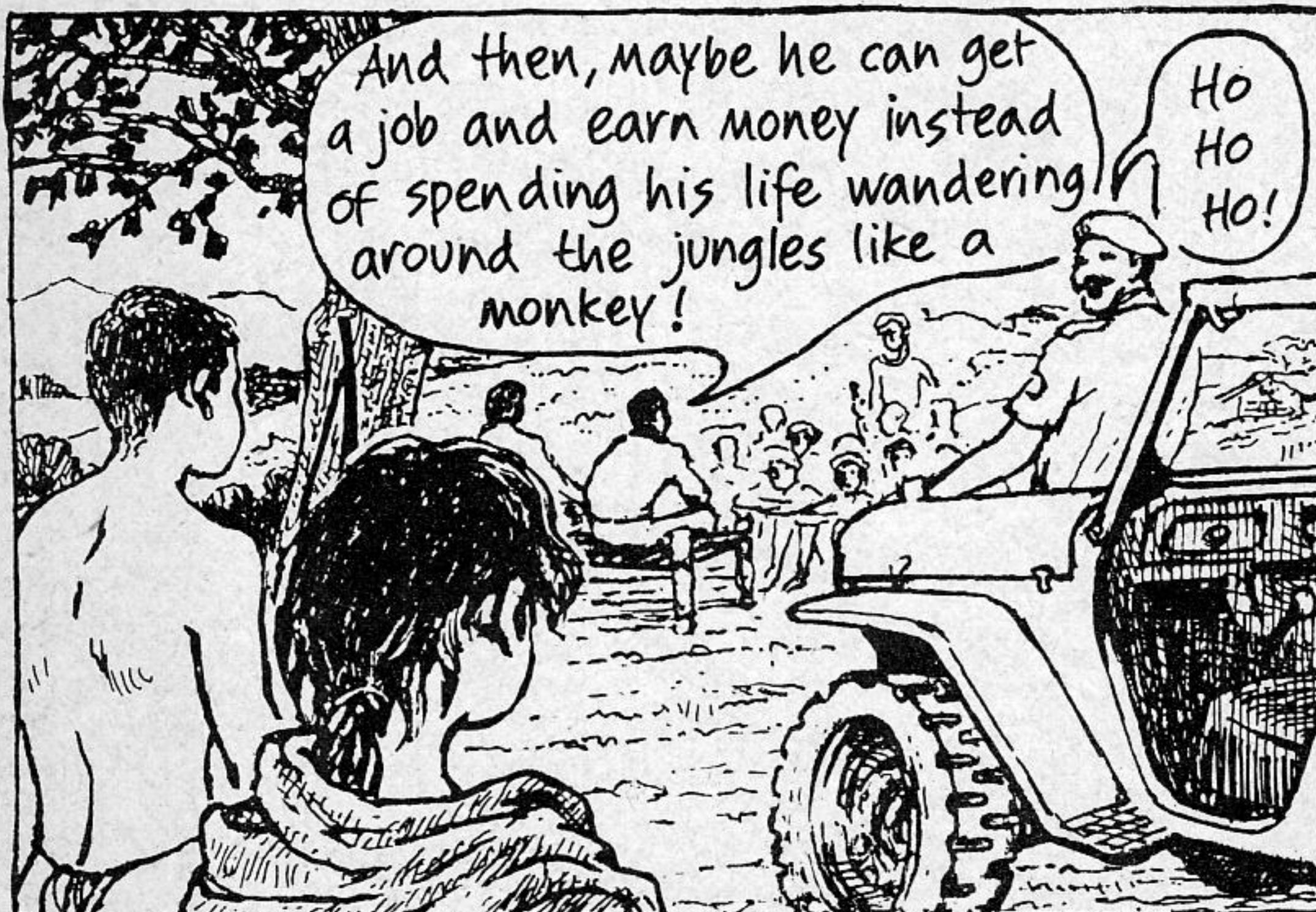
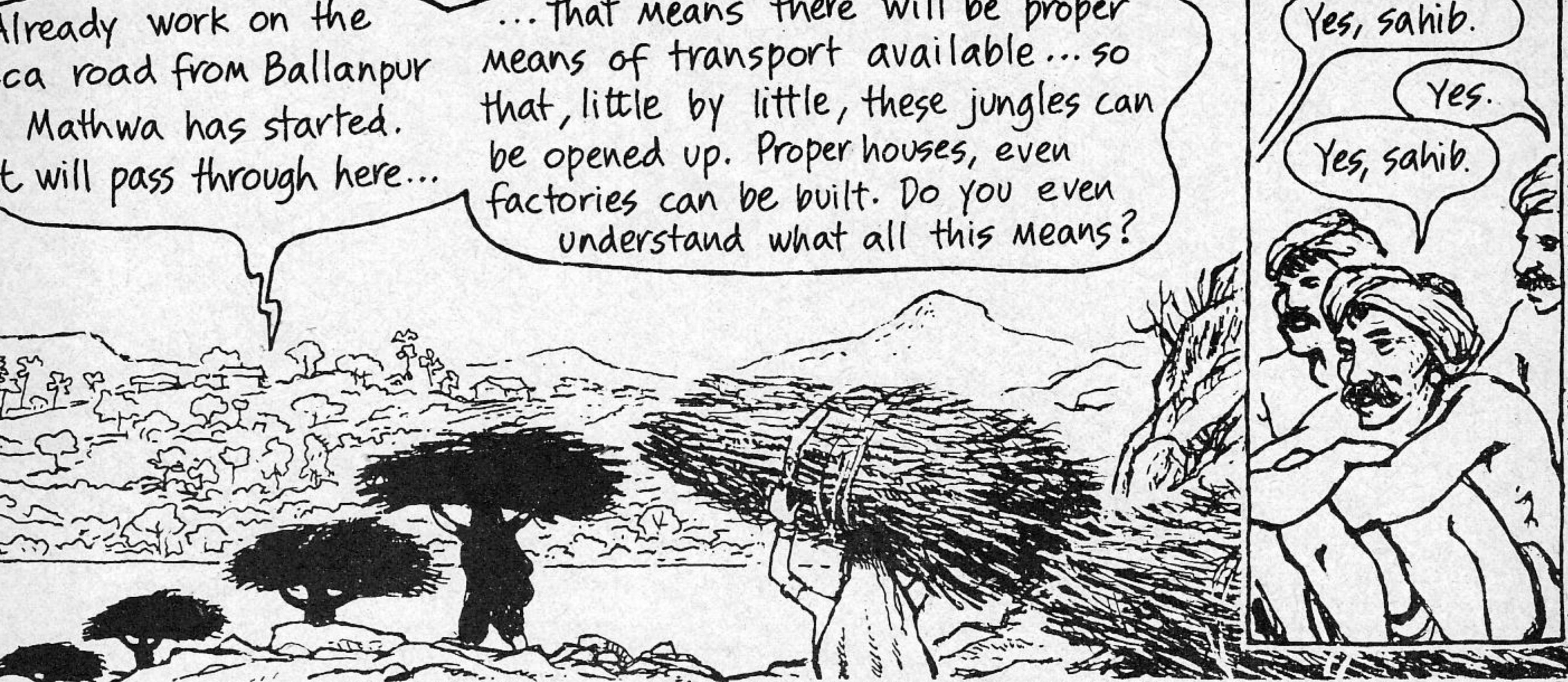
Does it mean we'll have to go away from here and live somewhere else?

No, you fool! What it means is that perhaps your son will get an education and acquire some intelligence!

And then, maybe he can get a job and earn money instead of spending his life wandering around the jungles like a monkey!

HO
HO
HO!

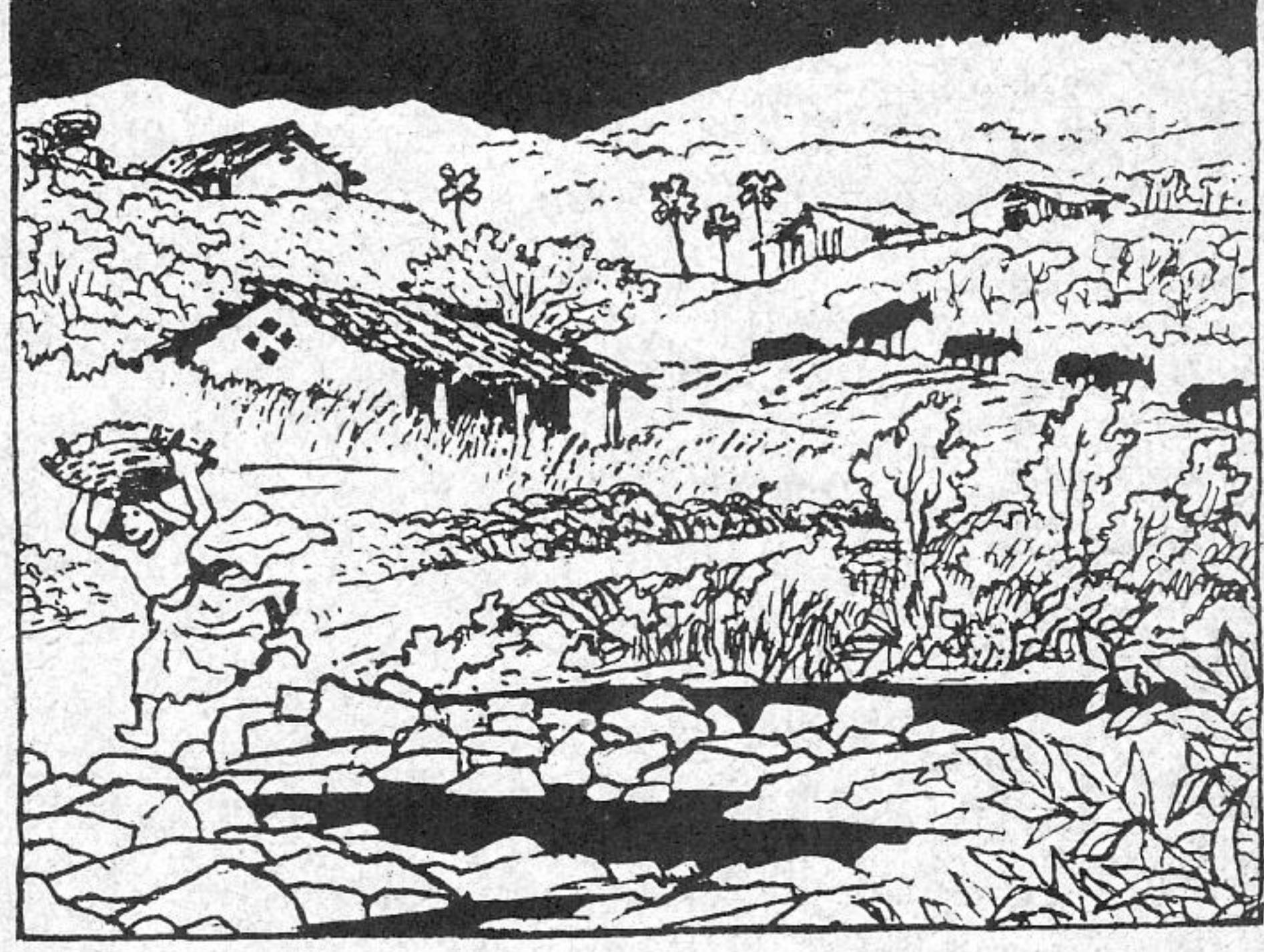
You there! Maybe you can begin by learning to put on clothes like the rest of us!



And you tell some of your didis that if they don't know how to cover themselves, I won't mind teaching them...

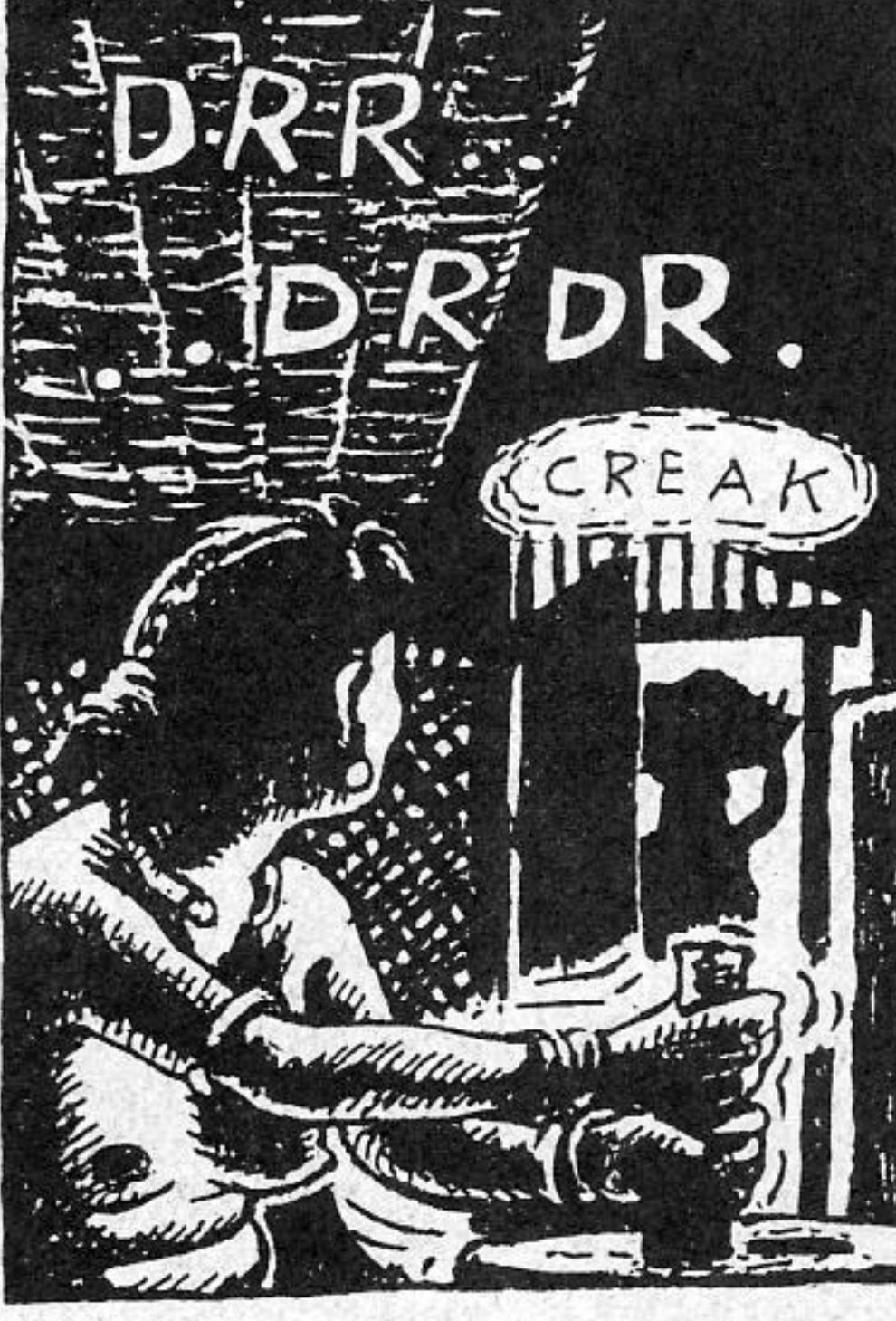
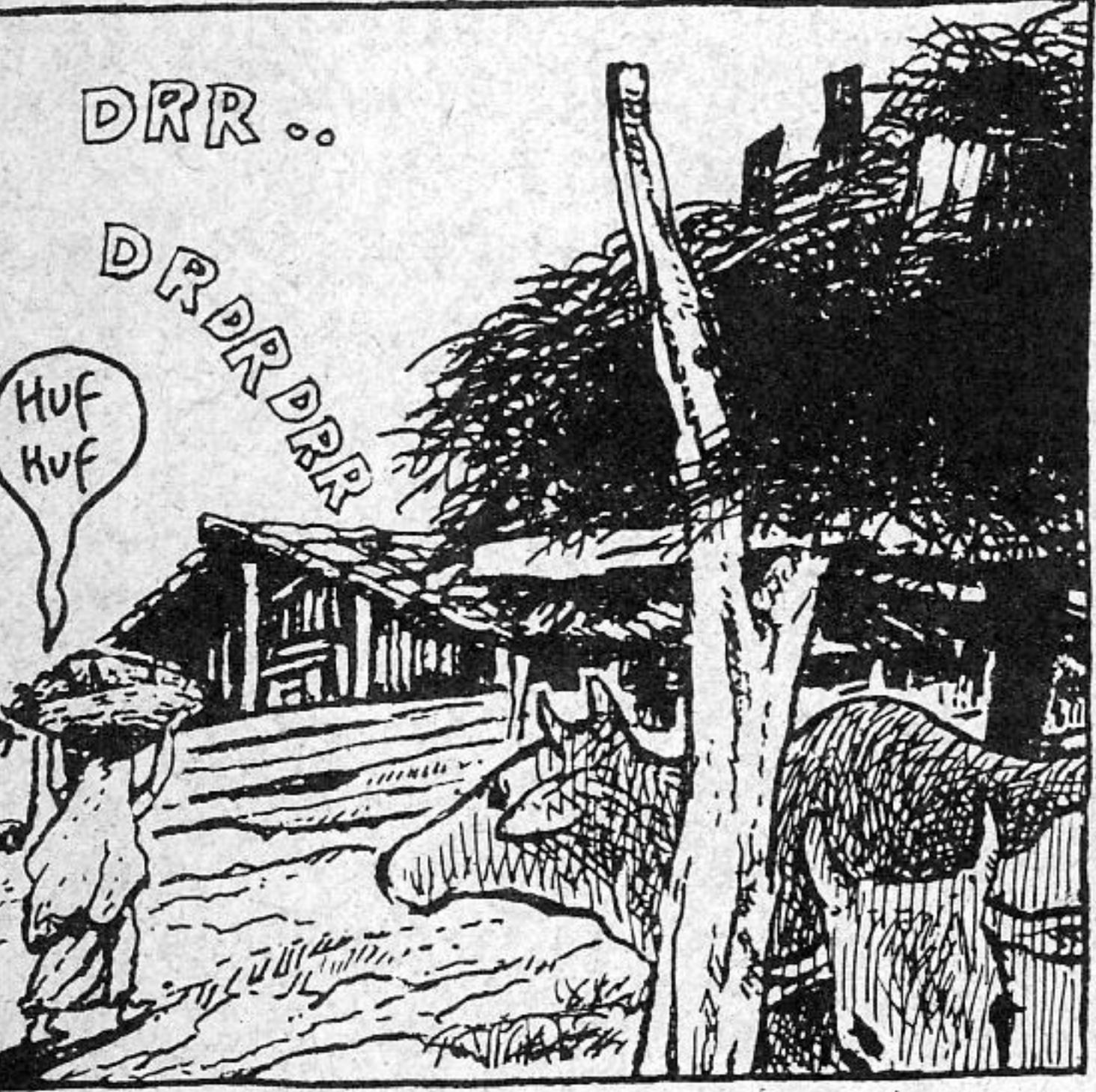


With my own hands! Haw Haw!



DRR ..

DR DR DRR



Oh, it's you. Have the sarkari people gone?



What's the matter, Relku? Why are you crying?



After that incident, Vishnubhai, many sarkari people started to come to our area - doing surveys, measuring land, and so on....



The forest guards became more and more strict. They would stop us even from collecting firewood - from the very forest where our deities and spirits lived!



We had to give gifts to the nakedar and other officers, or kill chickens when they came to the house – only then would they allow us to graze our cattle, collect grass for making rope...



While the thekedar, who had all sorts of papers and permits, were allowed to bring their labourers to cut down as many trees as they wished, to take away to the city.



The forest guards were very friendly with them, and they would come and go together in their moters.



After some years, they completed the road that the rangersaab had told us about...

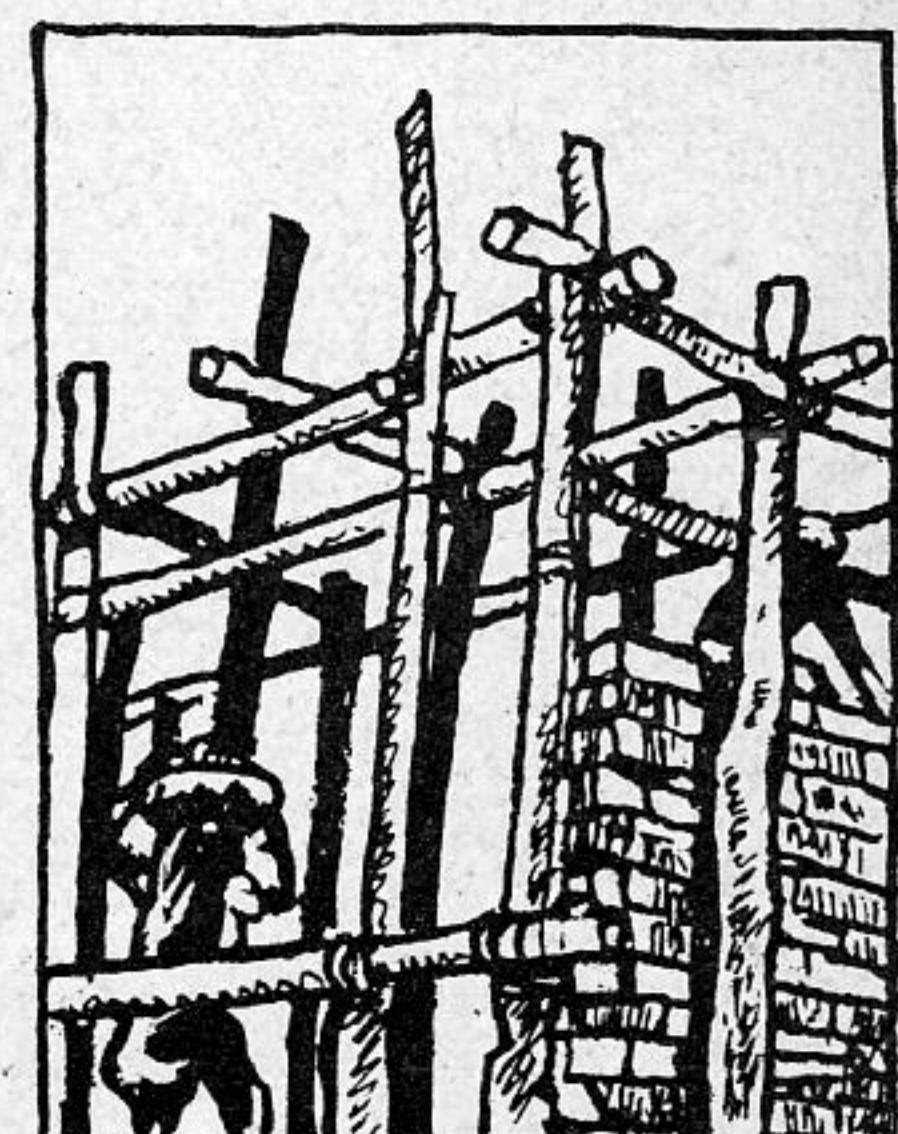
It was like a big snake, from whose belly emerged the caravans and moters of traders from the bazar.

Earlier, no bazarria would have come into our forest even by mistake. But the road changed that...

They started by setting up small shops and businesses near the road...



Slowly, they began to take over our land, sometimes even by force...



Oh, it was sad to see... so many lost their homes at that time. We did not know that our turn would also come soon.

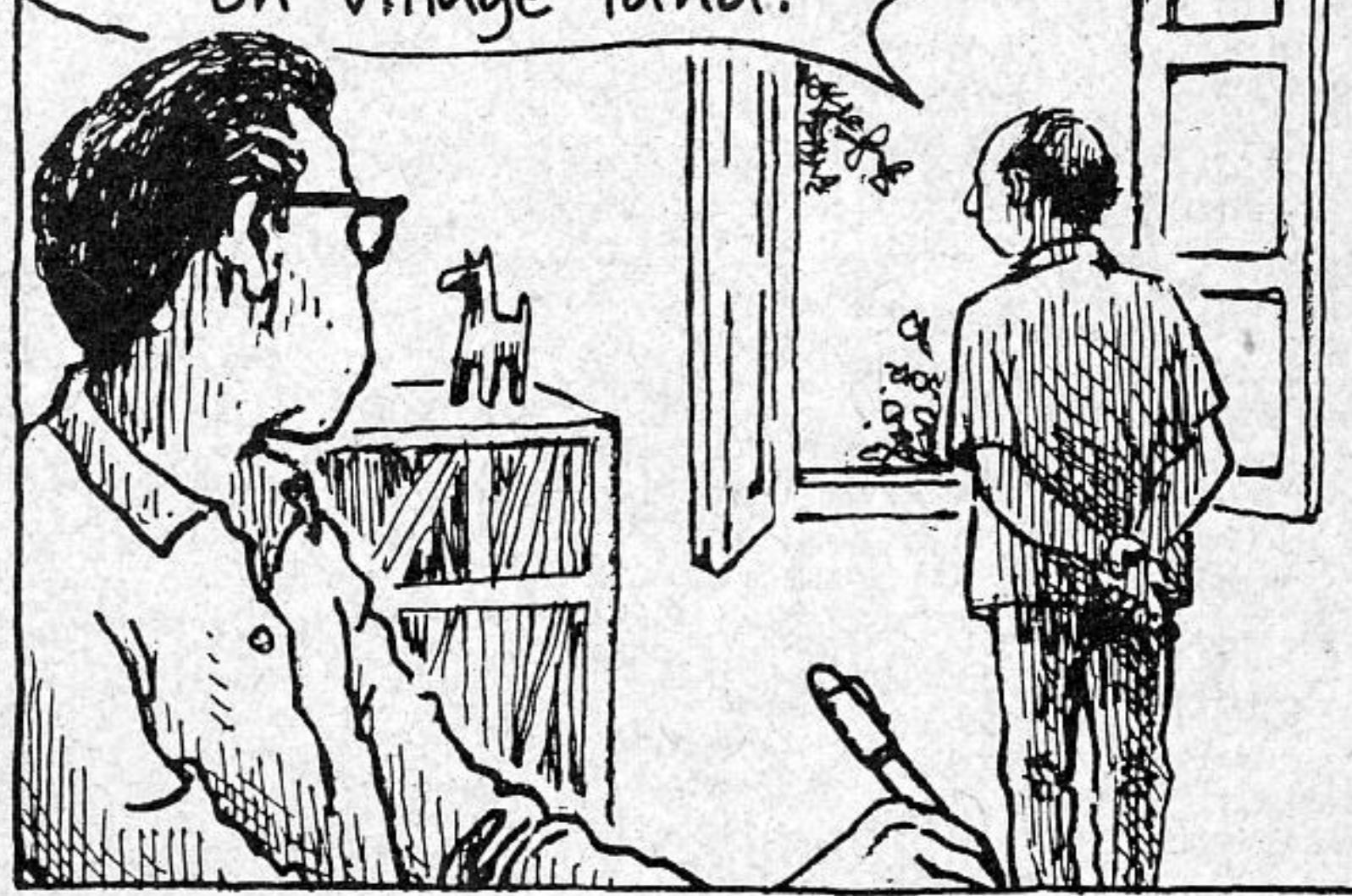
I see... but couldn't you people have gone to the police, or were they also a part of it?



The basic problem, rangersaab, in developing the Jamli area, is the attitude of the adivasis there....

They have begun to get increasingly uncooperative and resentful of 'outsiders' entering what they consider to be THEIR forest.

Just the other day, some of my men were roughed up by a gang of adivasis claiming that trees were being felled on village land.

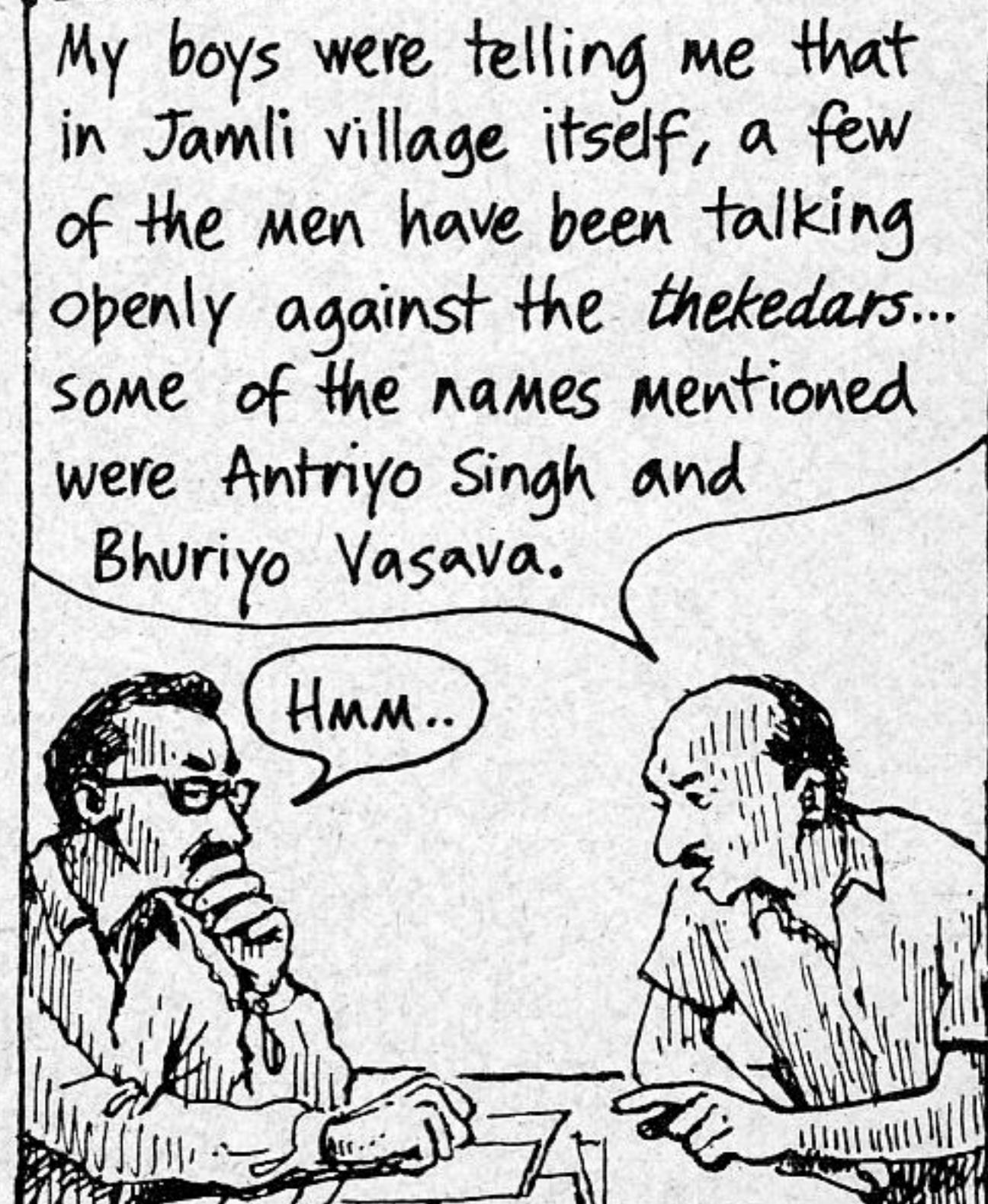
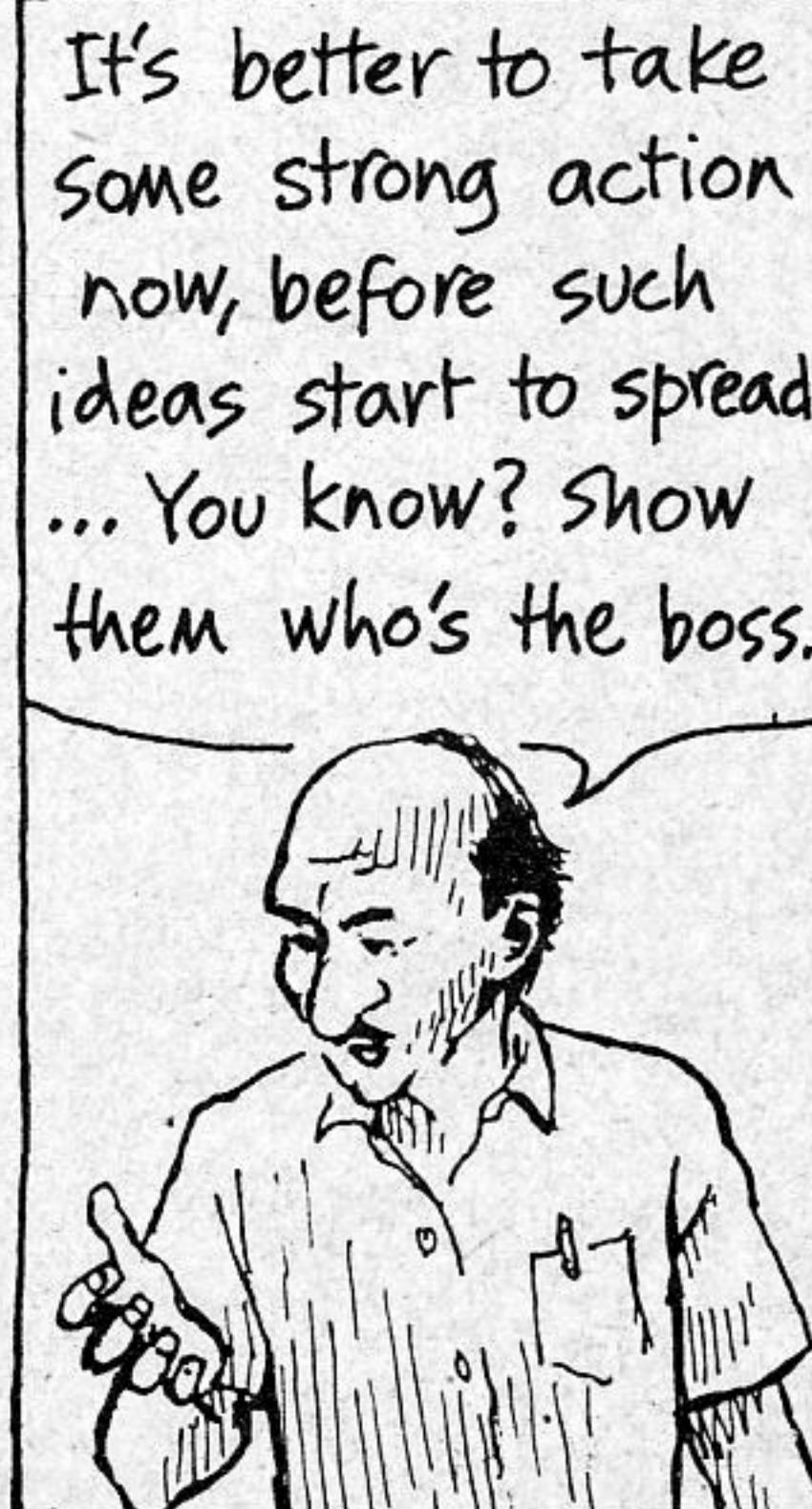
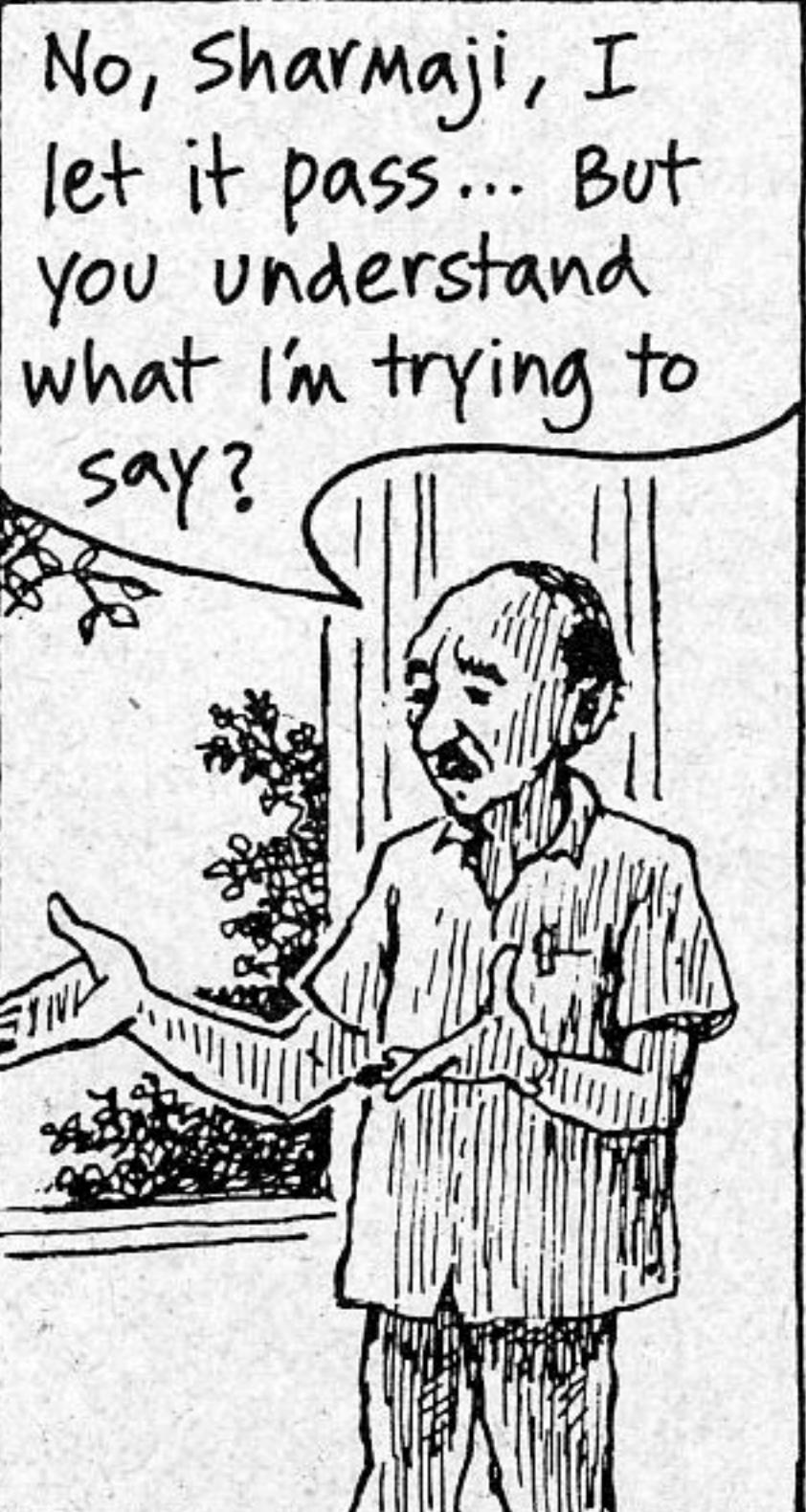


Really? Did you lodge a police complaint?

No, Sharmaji, I let it pass... But you understand what I'm trying to say?

It's better to take some strong action now, before such ideas start to spread... You know? Show them who's the boss.

My boys were telling me that in Jamli village itself, a few of the men have been talking openly against the thekedar... Some of the names mentioned were Antriyo Singh and Bhuriyo Vasava.



I see what you mean...
A crackdown on the
more vocal ones will serve
as an effective example
for the rest!

Don't worry, Aggarwal.
Your interests as
a forest contractor
will be taken care
of.

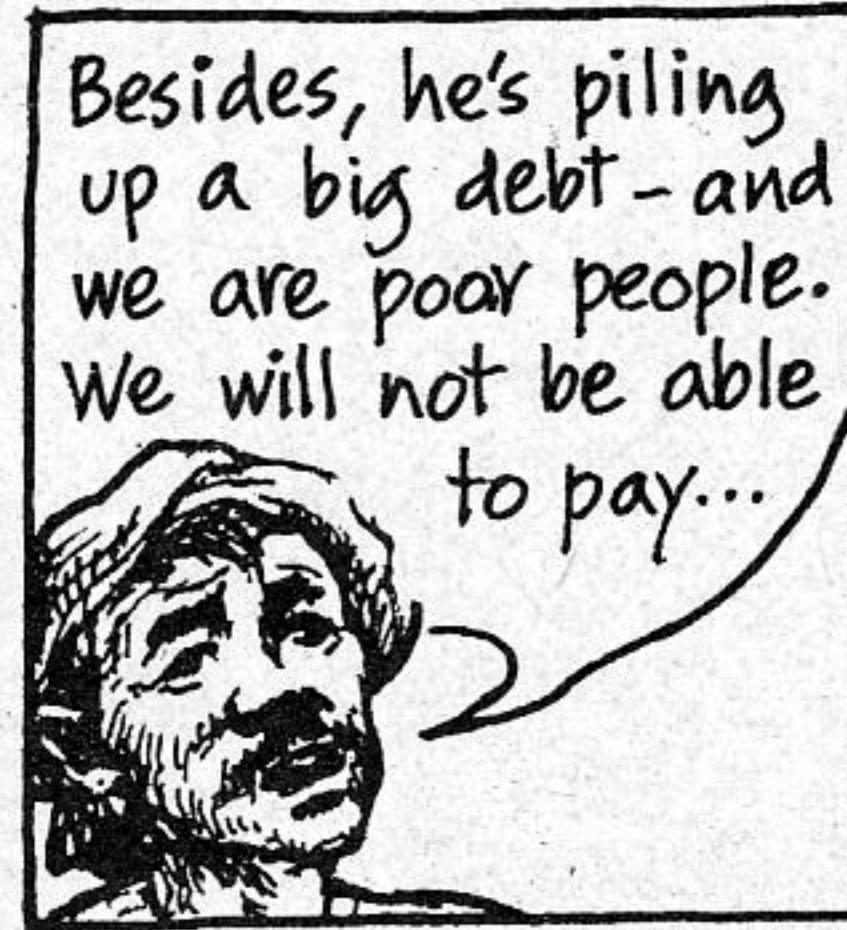
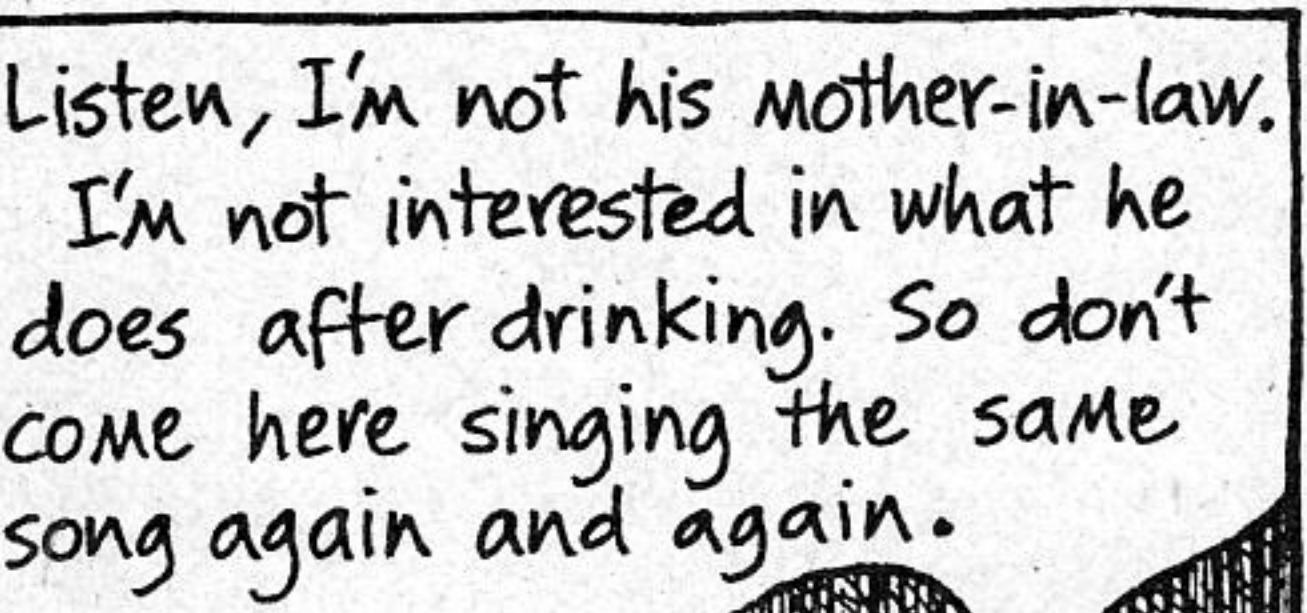
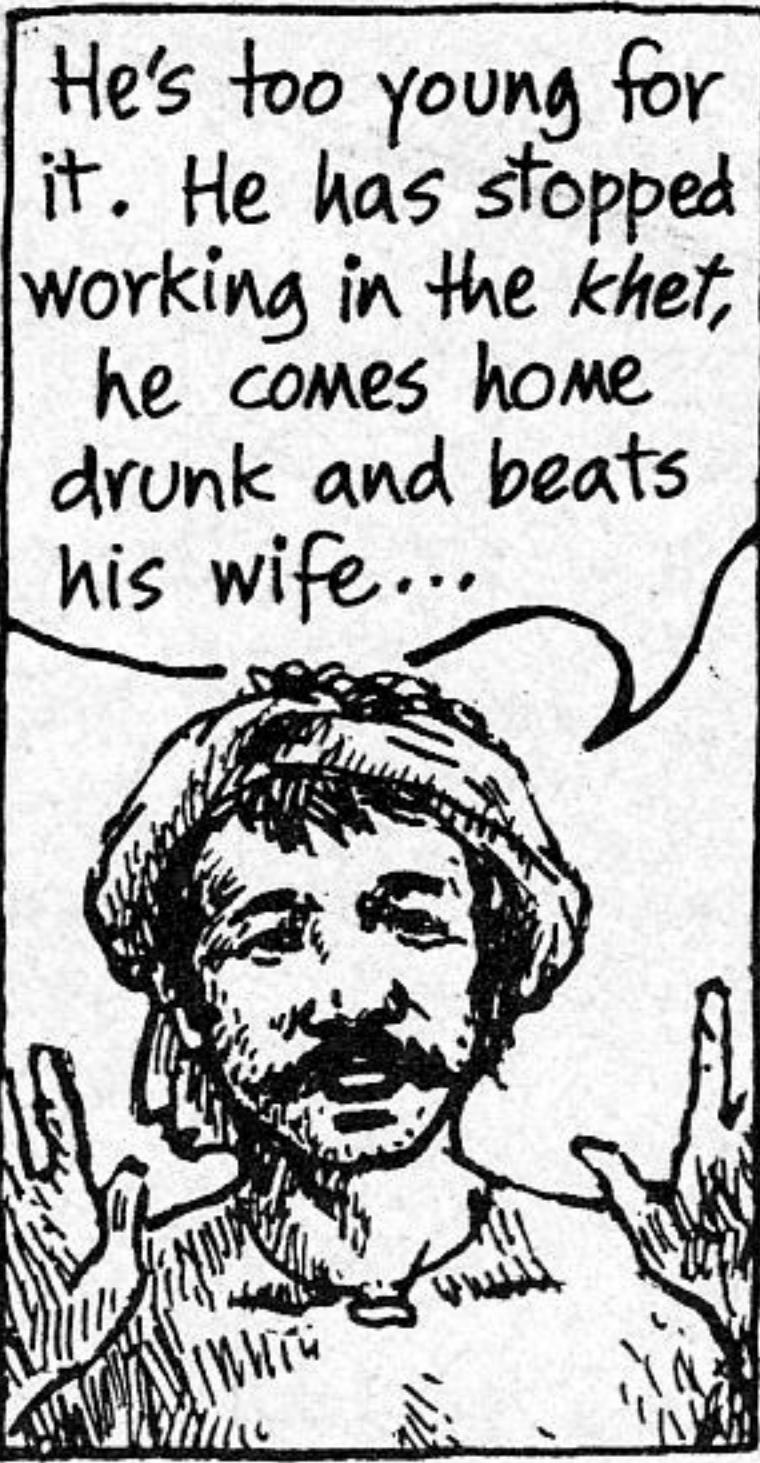
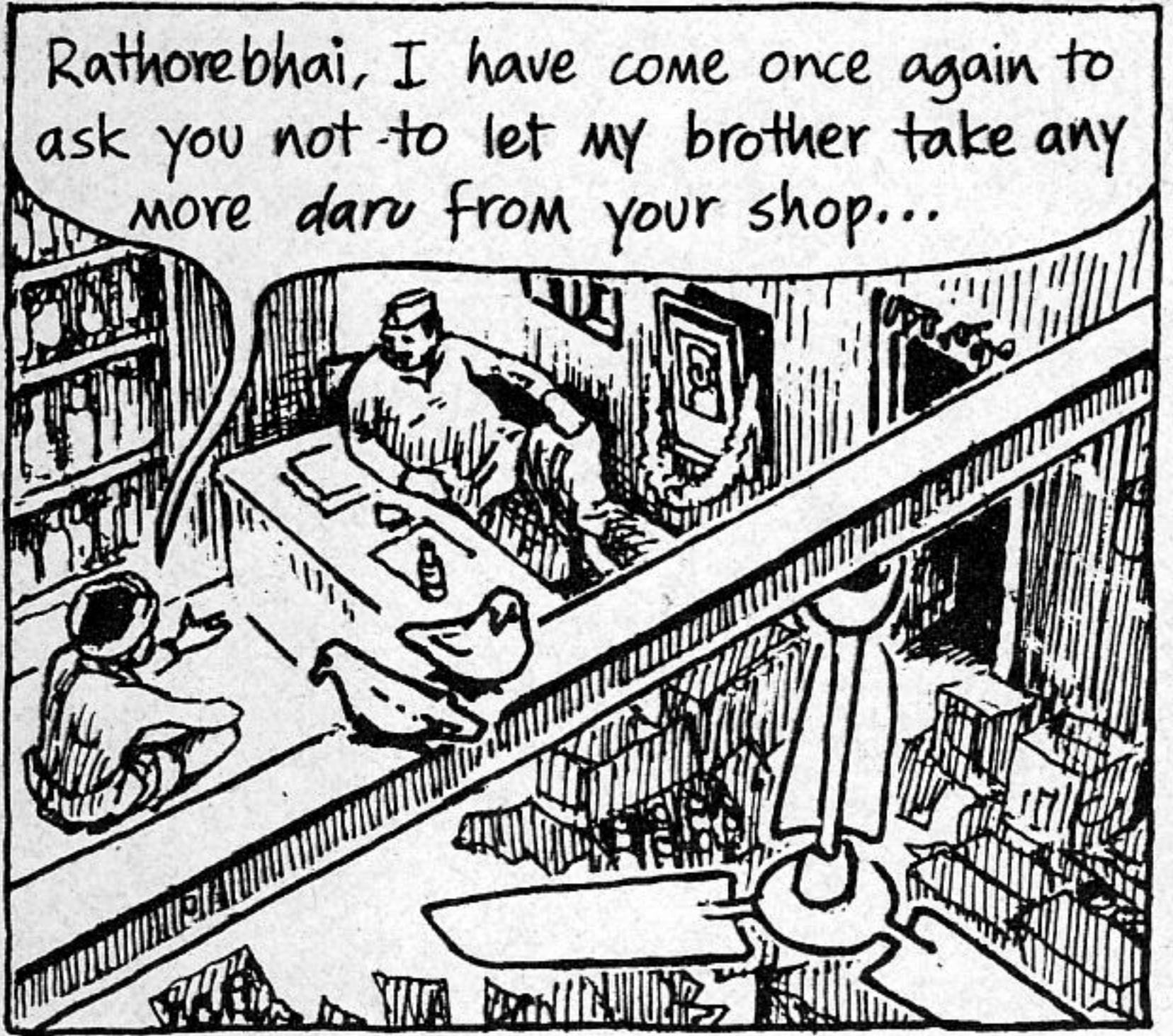
I'm meeting the
police inspector of
Jamli thana
tomorrow... I'll
have a word with
him.

Thank you, rangersaab!
The promptness and
efficiency with which you
handle such affairs has
made you something of a
legendary figure in these
parts!

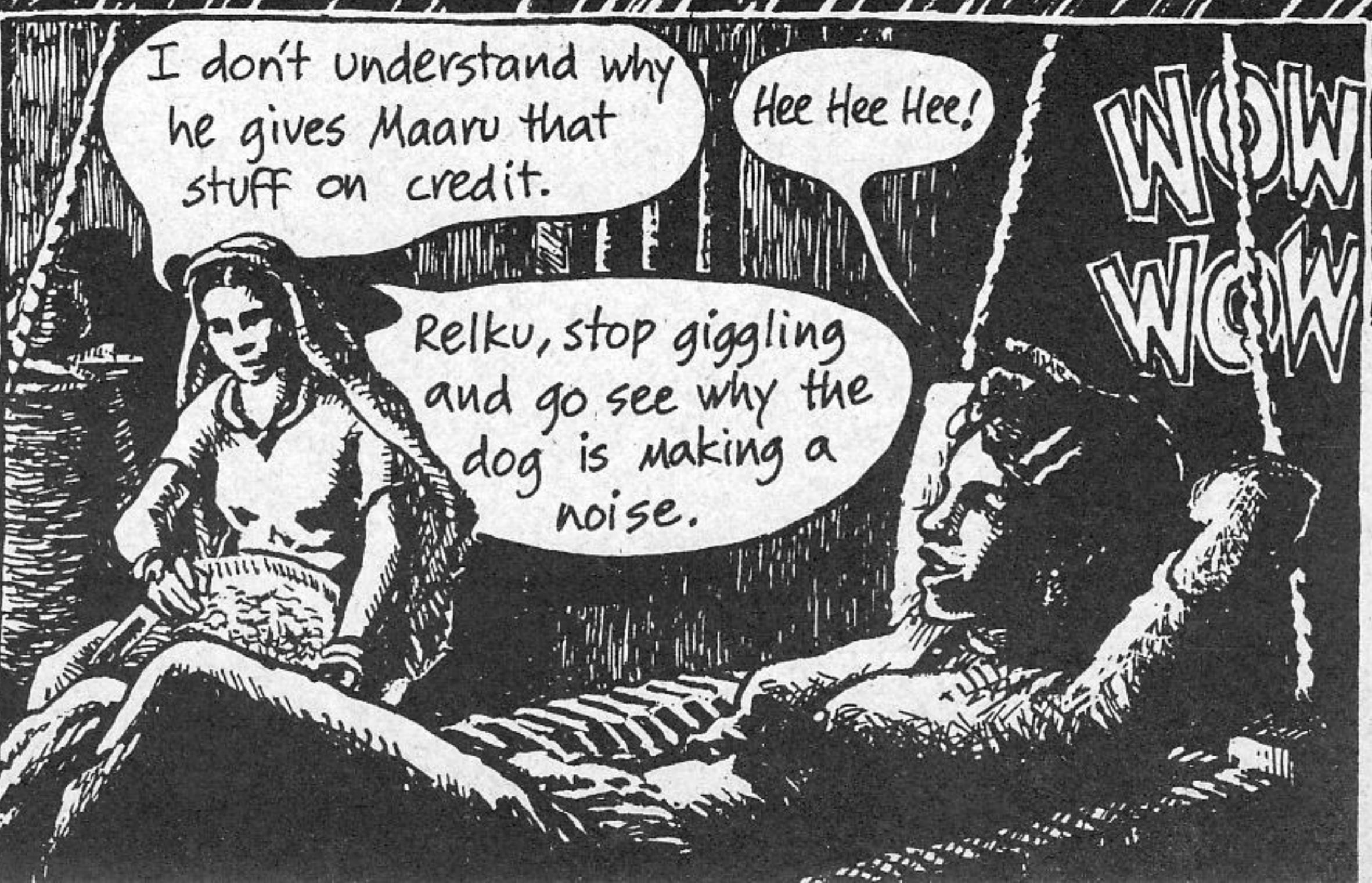
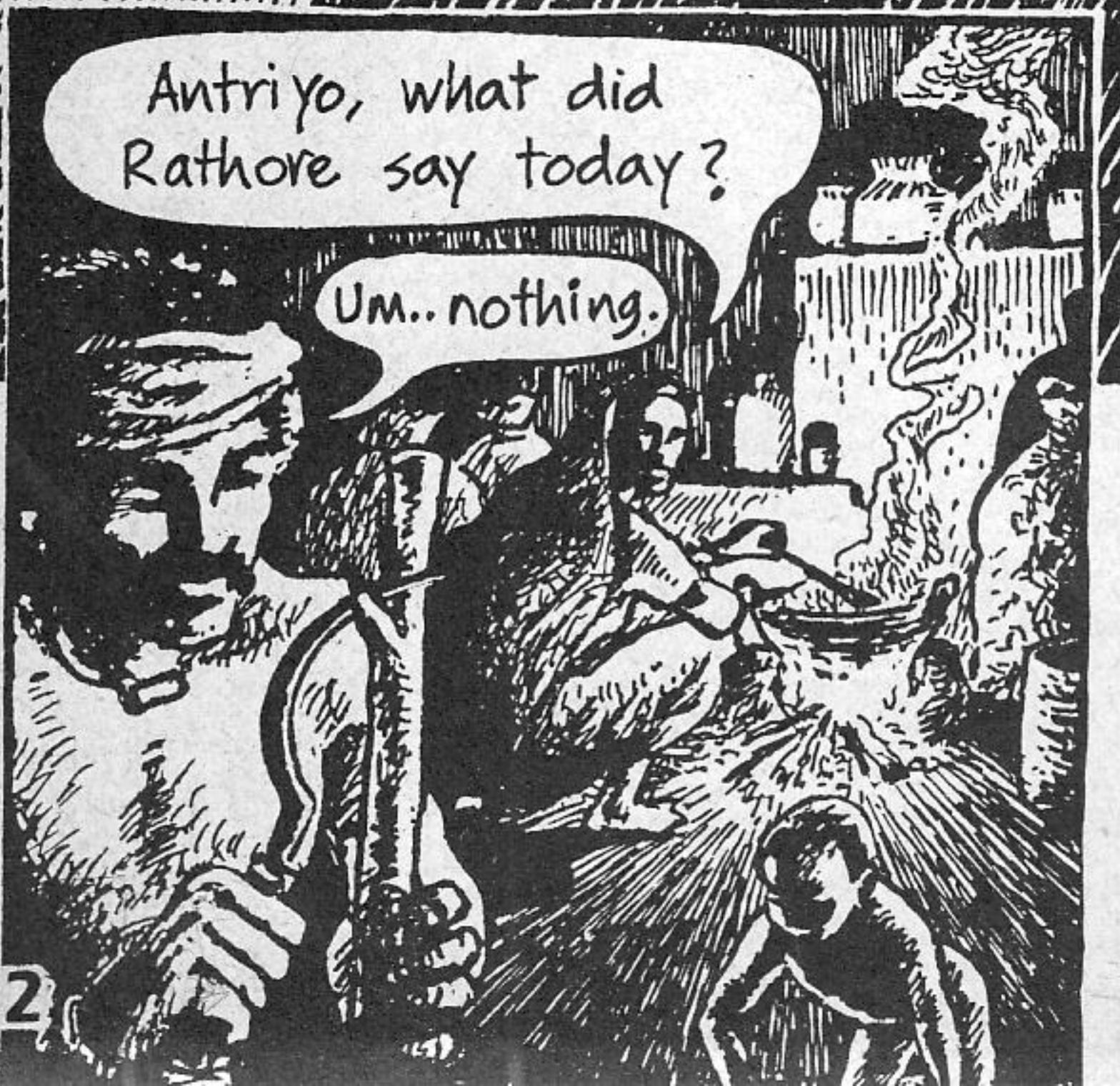
Come, come, there's no need for
this flattery. Helping these backward
people to improve themselves is not just
a duty for me, but a
personal mission.

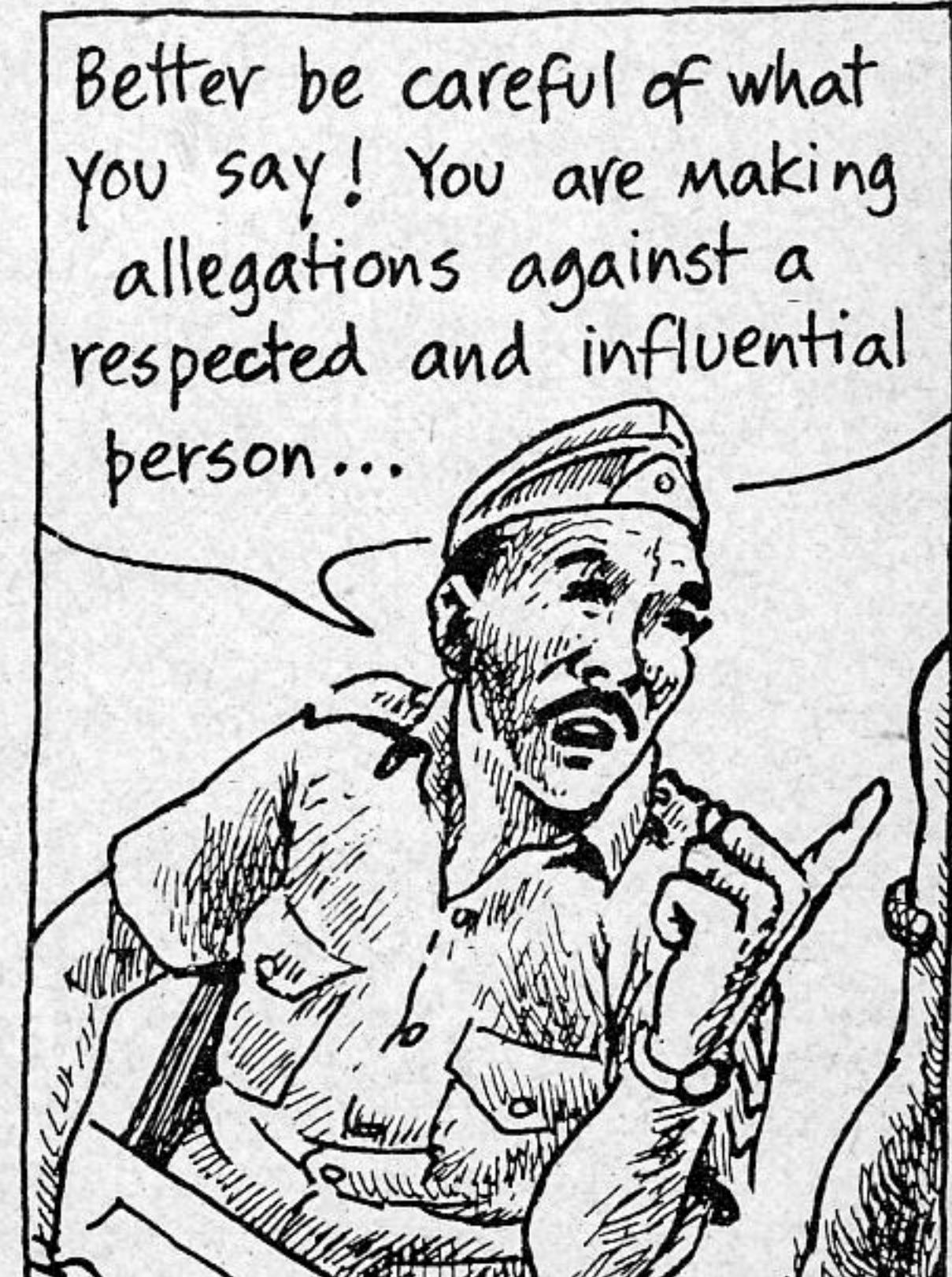
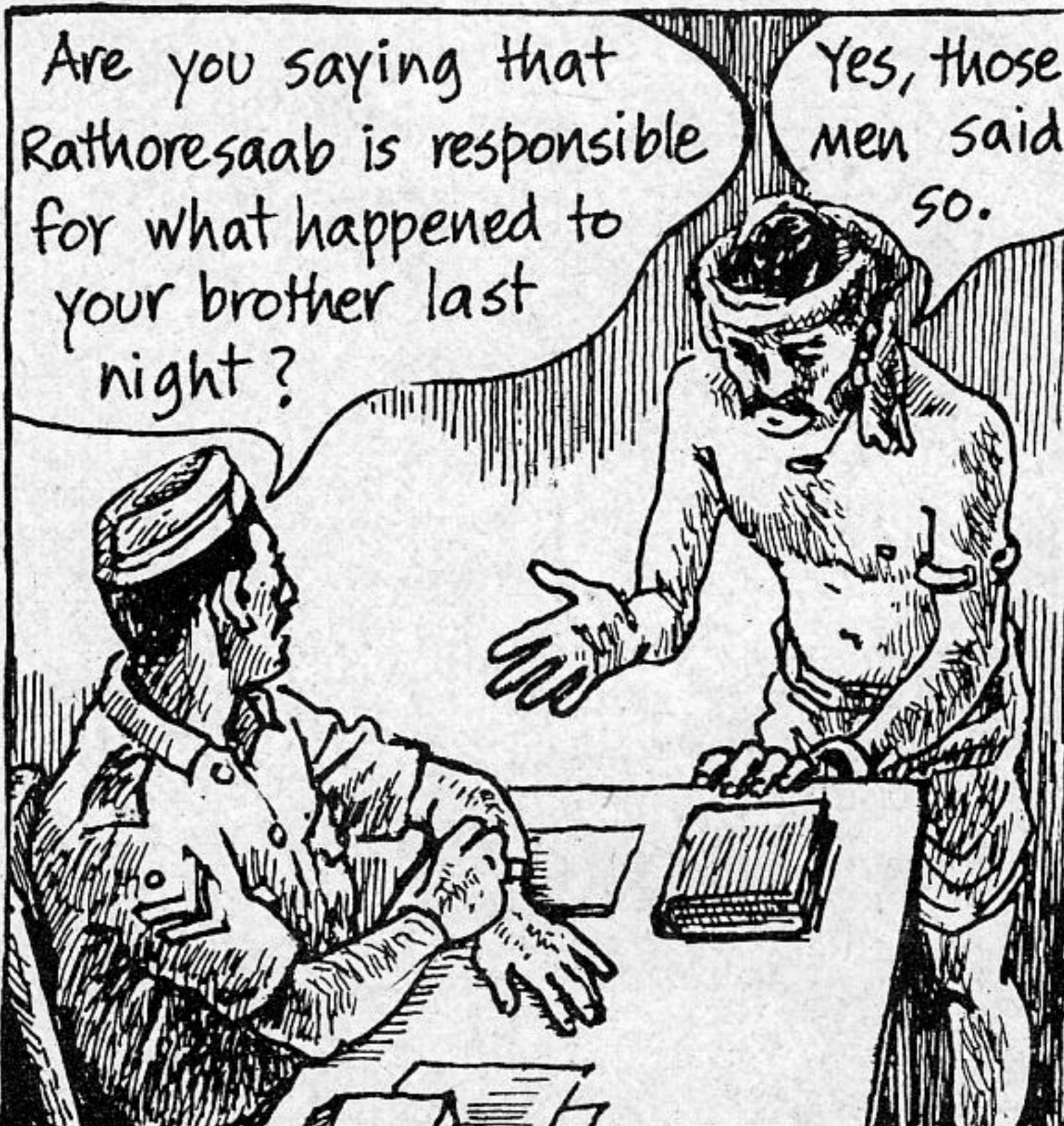
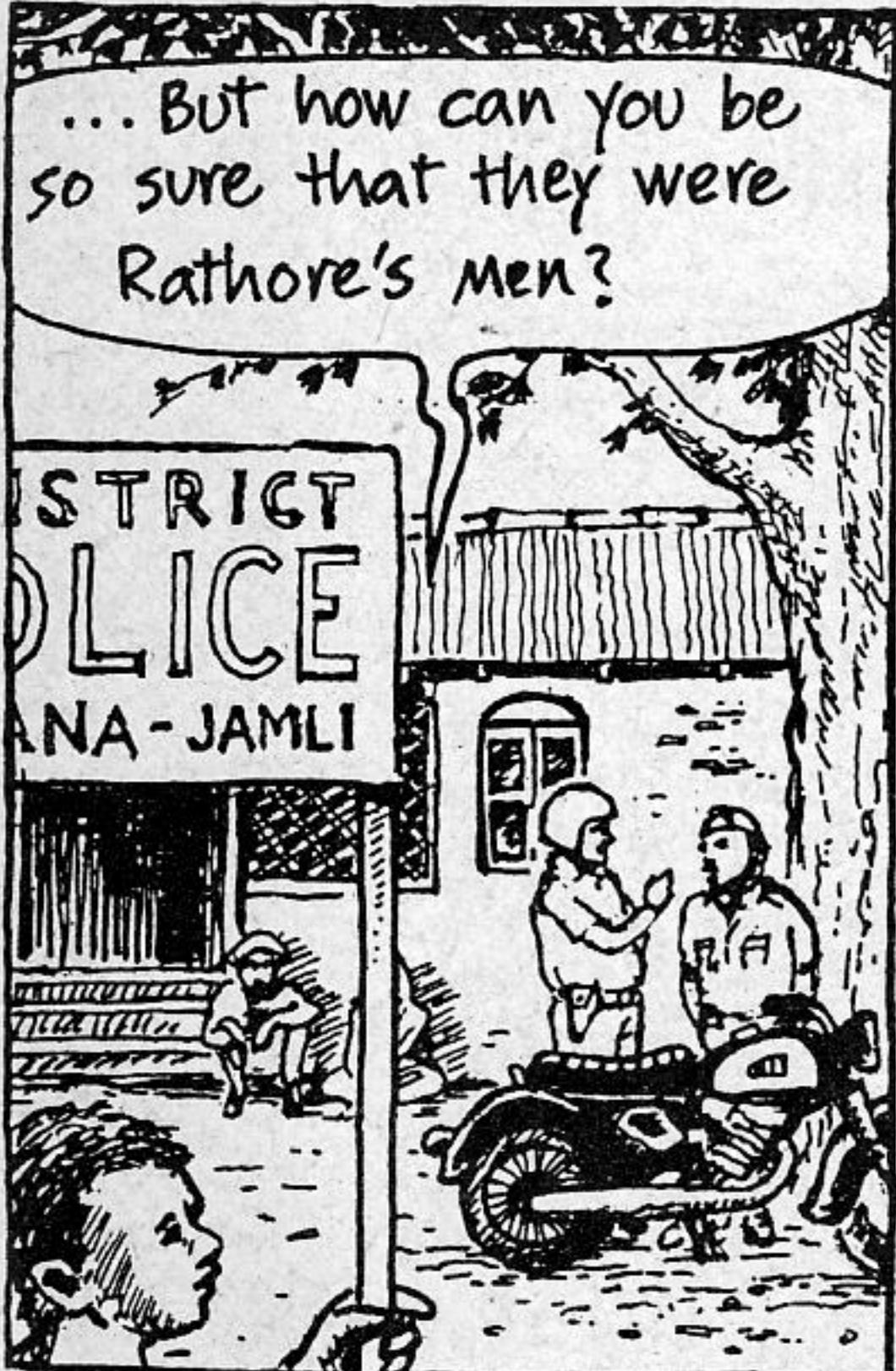
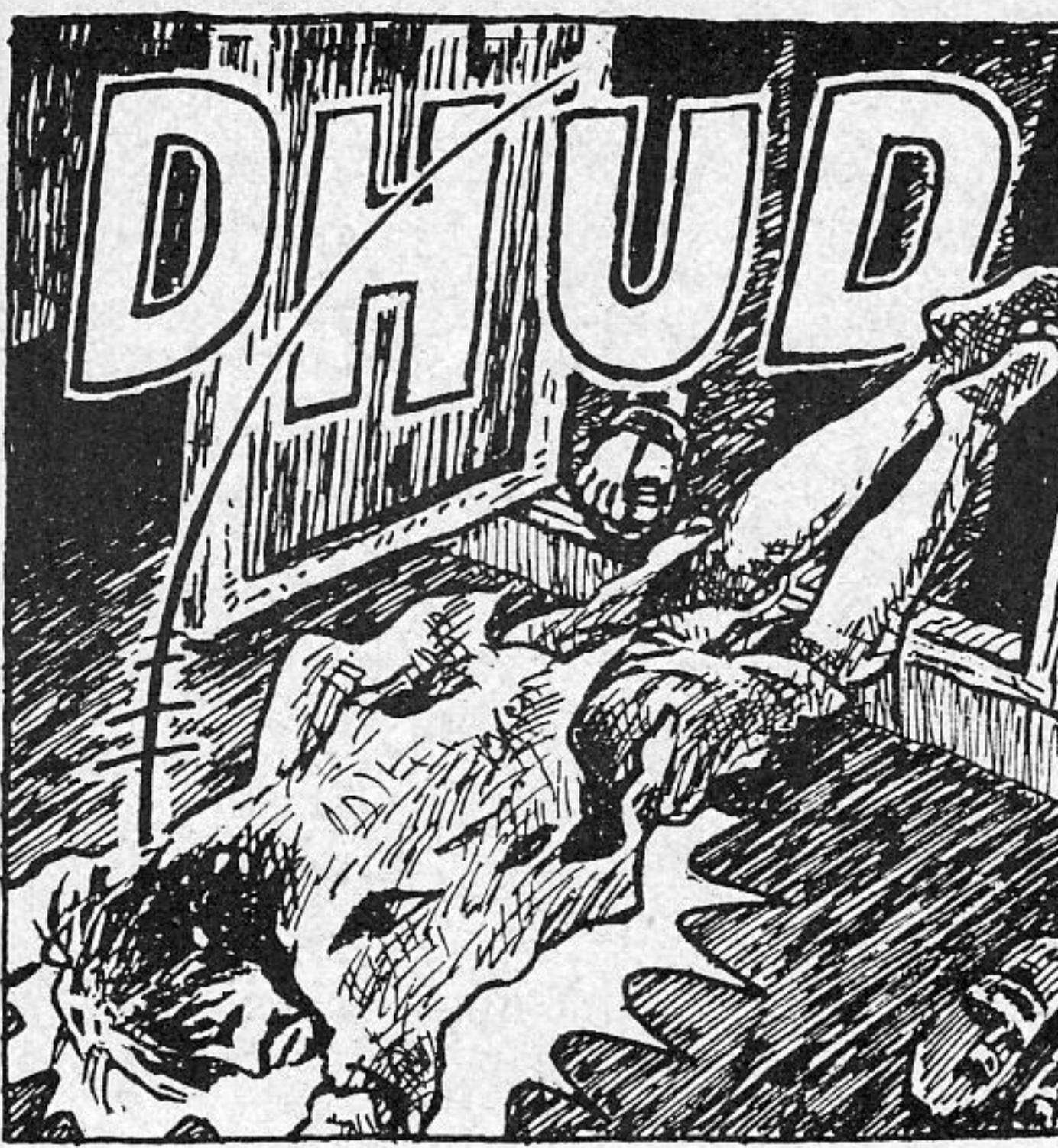
I will never know when and why
they decided to pick on us...
perhaps because my father refused
to be cowed by the thekedar and
his bullies.... Or perhaps because our
land was very good land, near
the river....

... And Rathore, the big liquor merchant
had his eye on it. It was he who got my
uncle Maaru addicted to Inglish by
encouraging him to take it on credit.



Hee Hee Hee!
The rain will do him good!





If, by chance, it turns out to be untrue, you're going to be in big trouble.



So think about it. Do you still want to make a complaint?



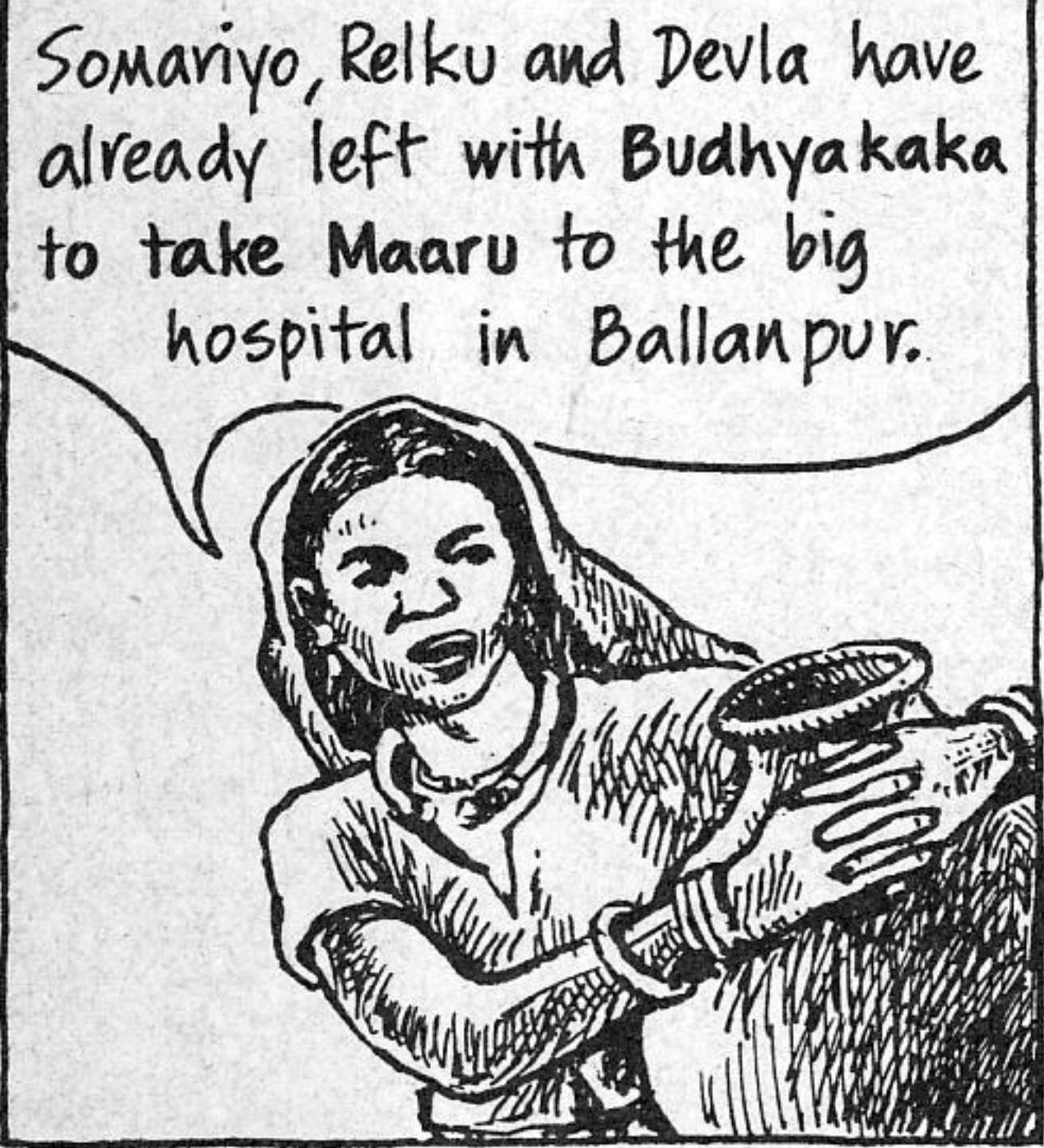
I think the constable tried to warn my father about the consequences of trying to tackle Rathore, but my father felt that he had been dishonoured. And, for our people, that is an intolerable thing.



But why was the officer reluctant in noting down your complaint?



Somariyo, Relku and Devla have already left with Budhyakaka to take Maaru to the big hospital in Ballapur.



Yes, I'm Antriyo... Have you come about my complaint?



Get in. You'll find out soon enough.



RRRRRR

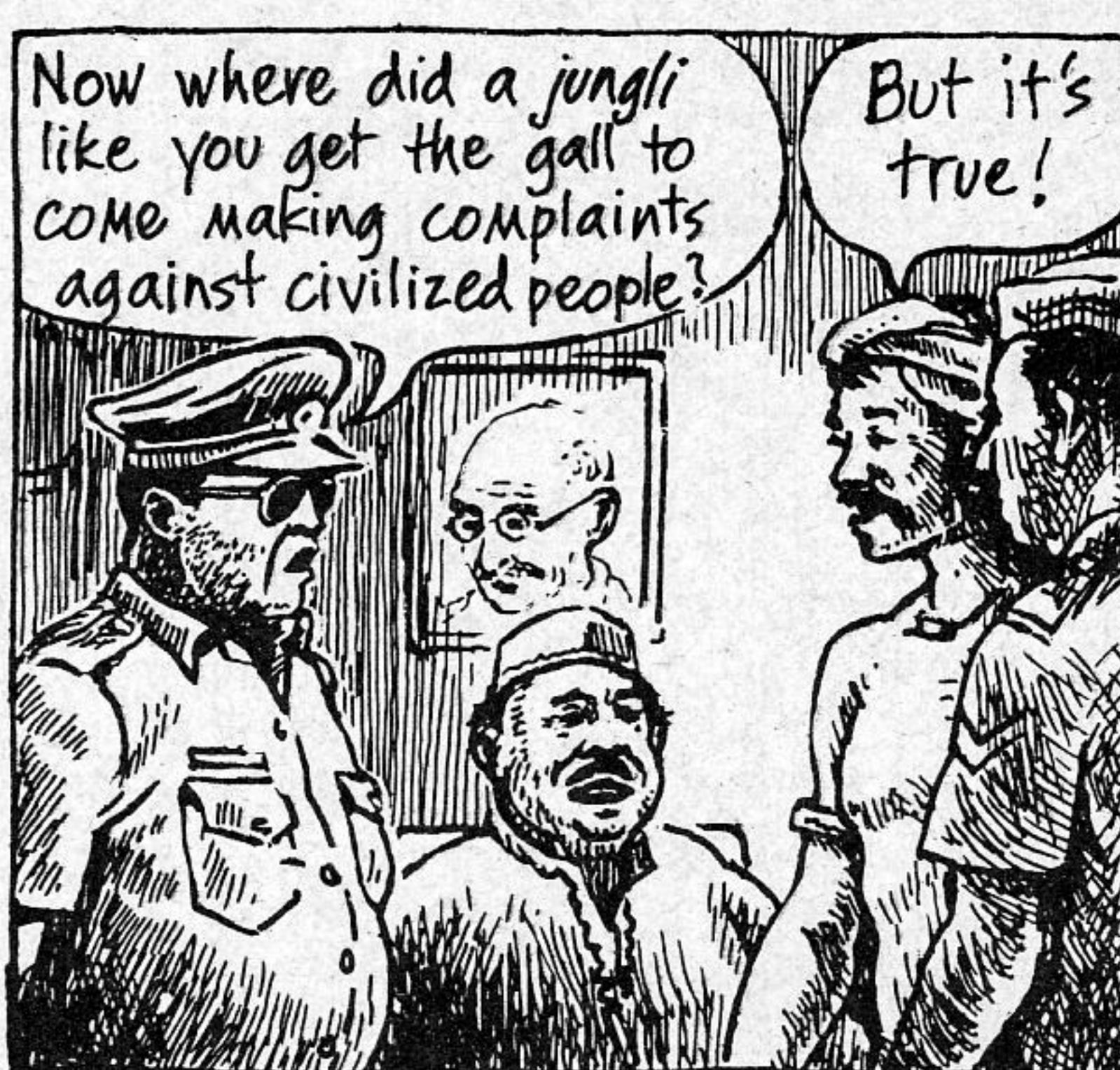


So, you're the one who's been making up stories about Rathoreji?

Now where did a jungli like you get the gall to come making complaints against civilized people?

But it's true!

UNN..H



SCUM! Falsely accusing Rathore saab in order to get out of paying your debts, hey?

WAIT!



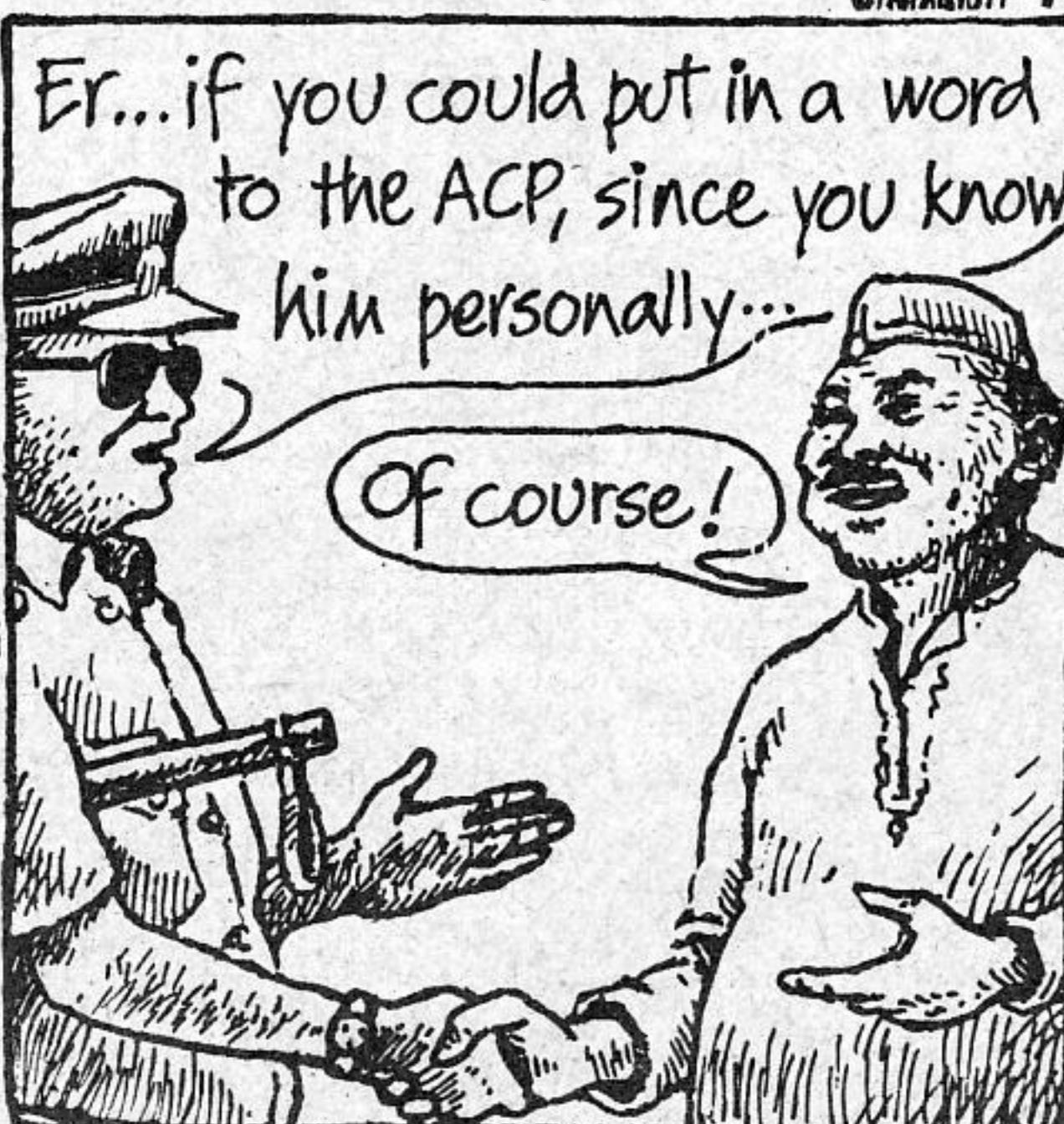
Okay, lock him up now.

That settles the matter then, Inspectorsaab.

Right.

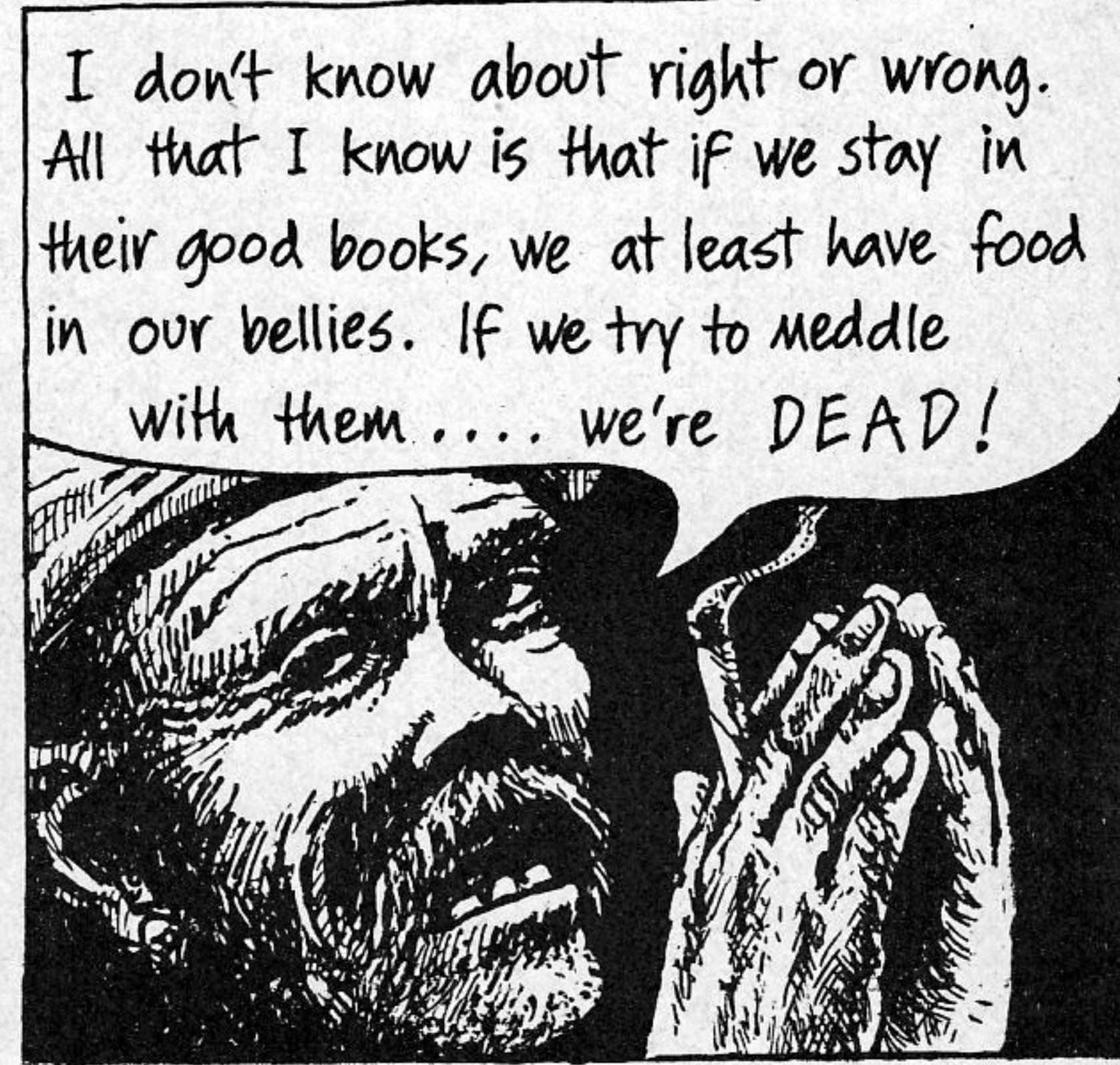
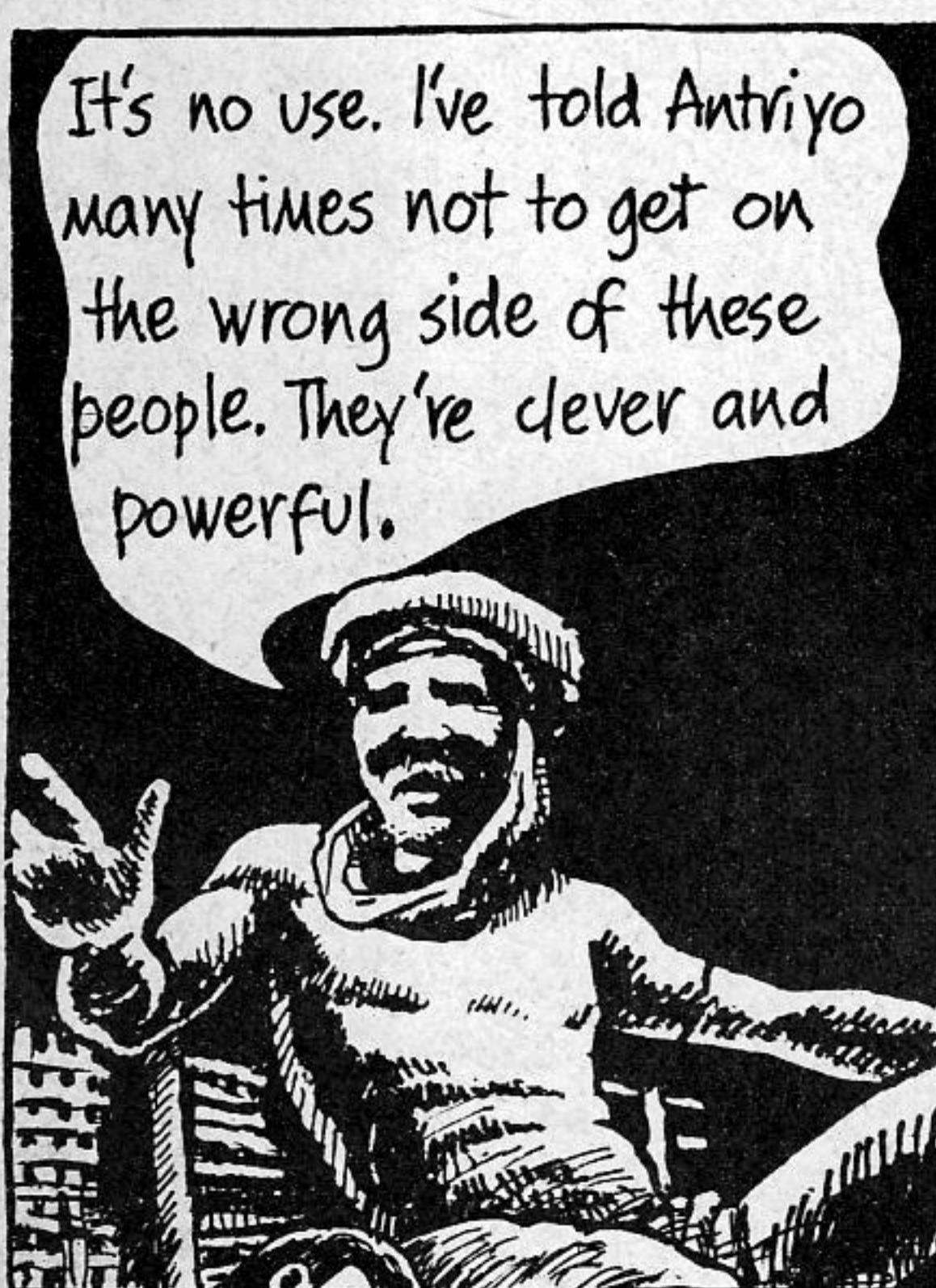
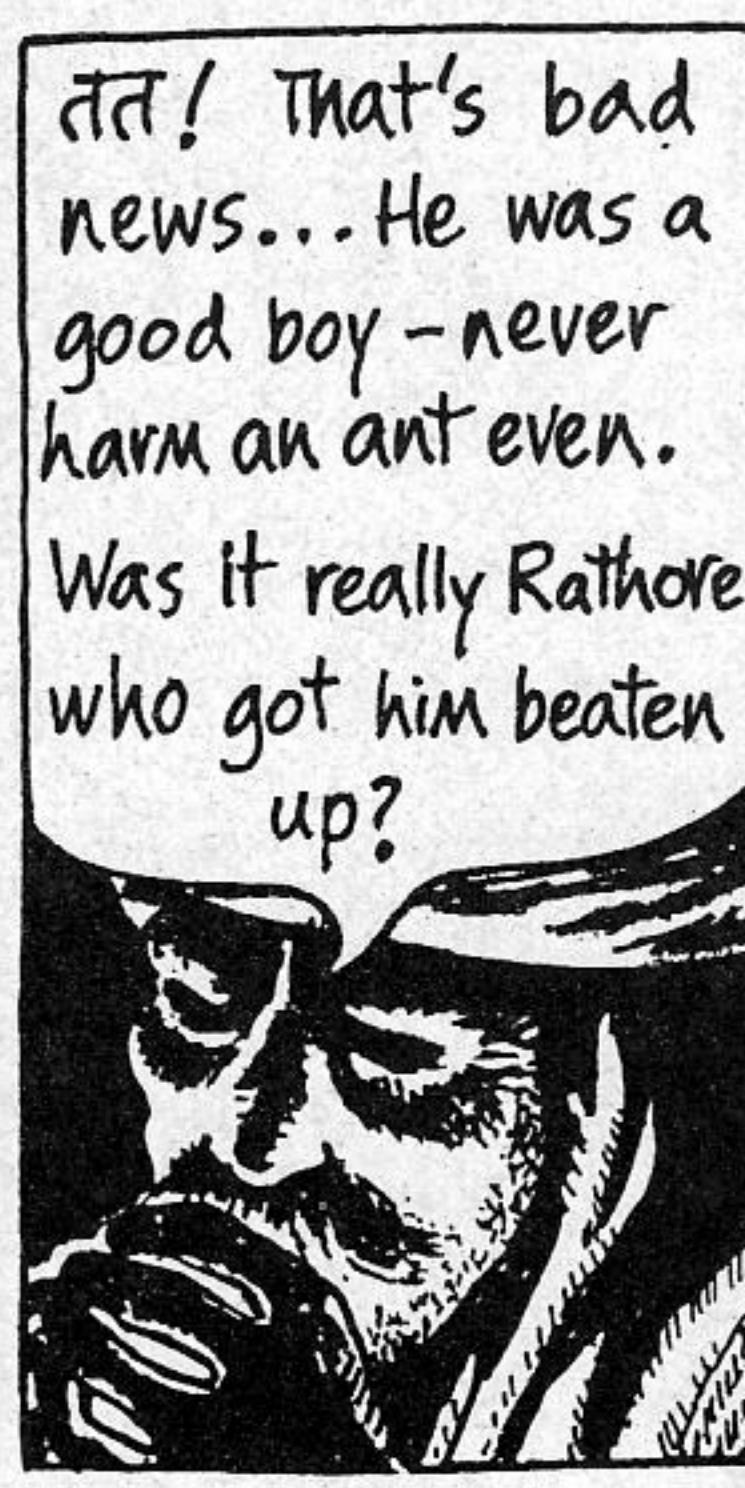
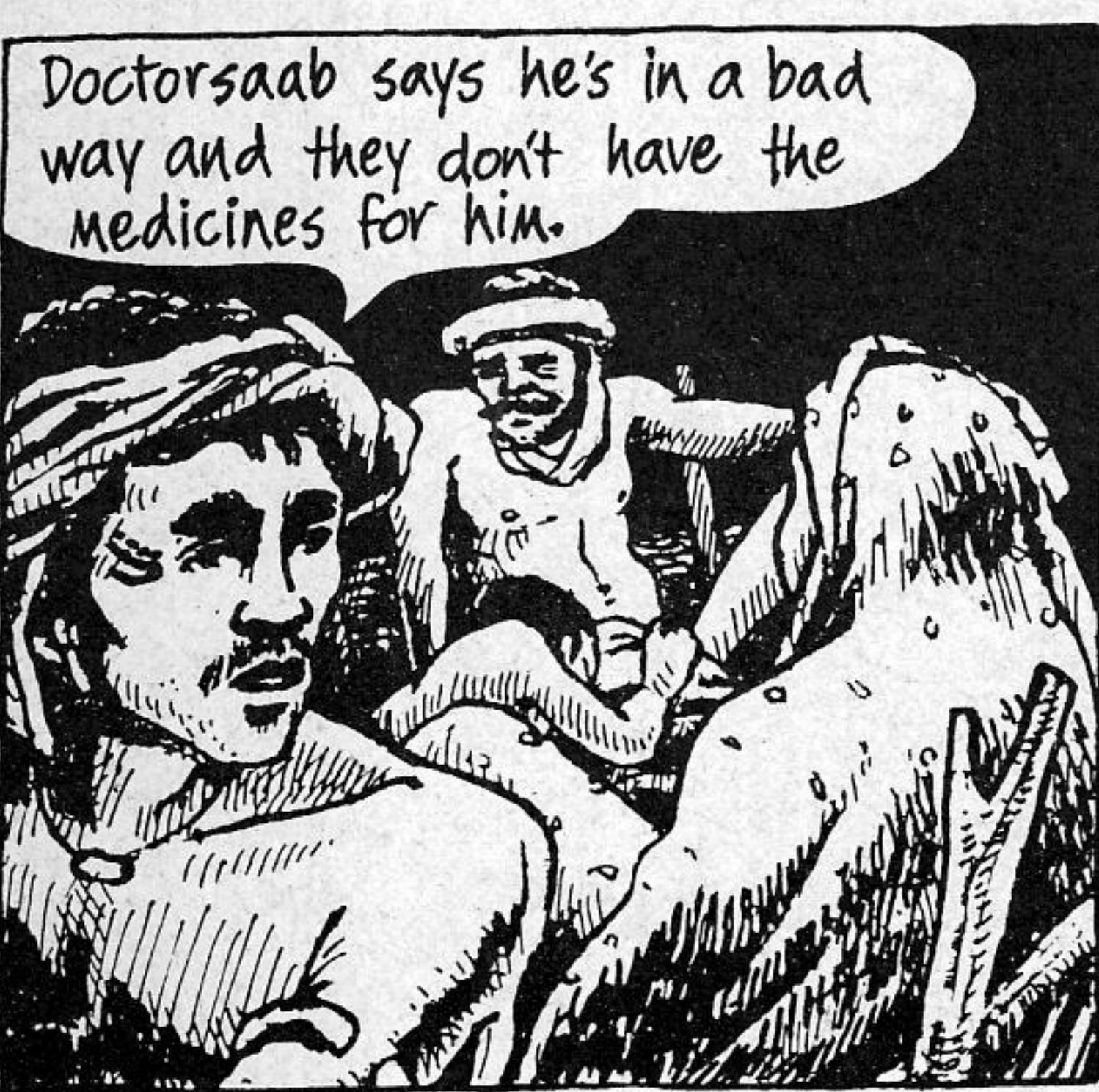
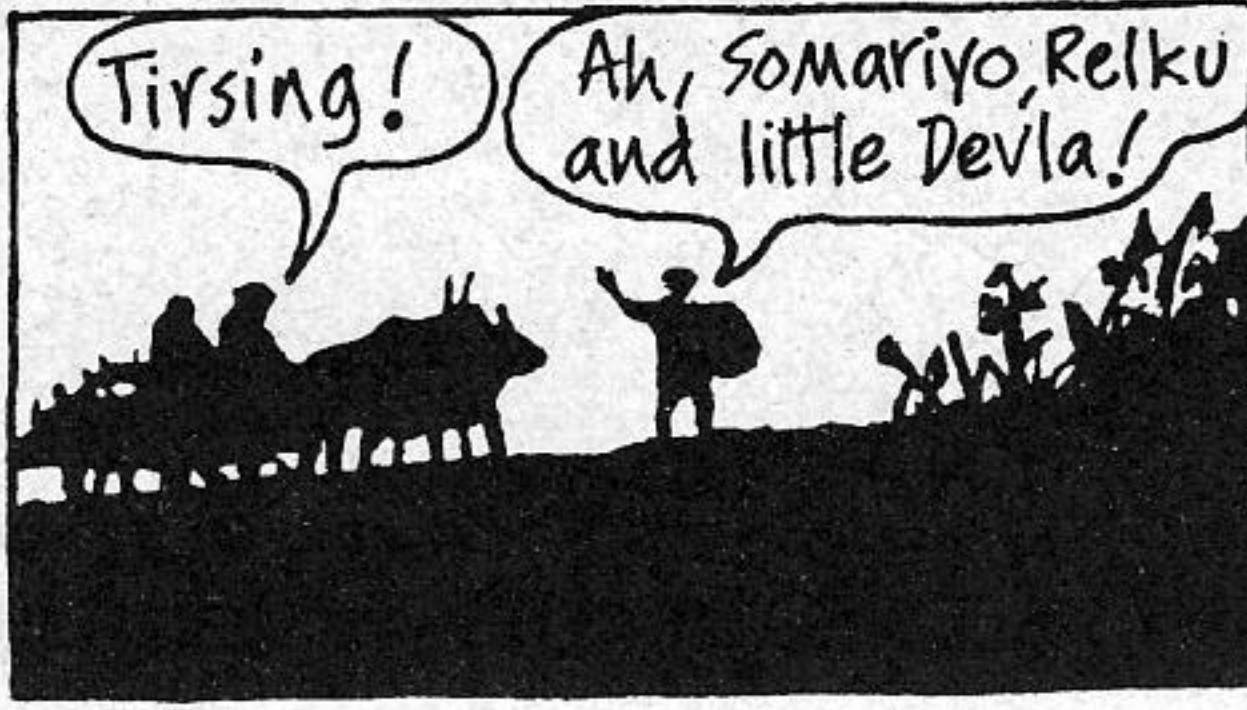
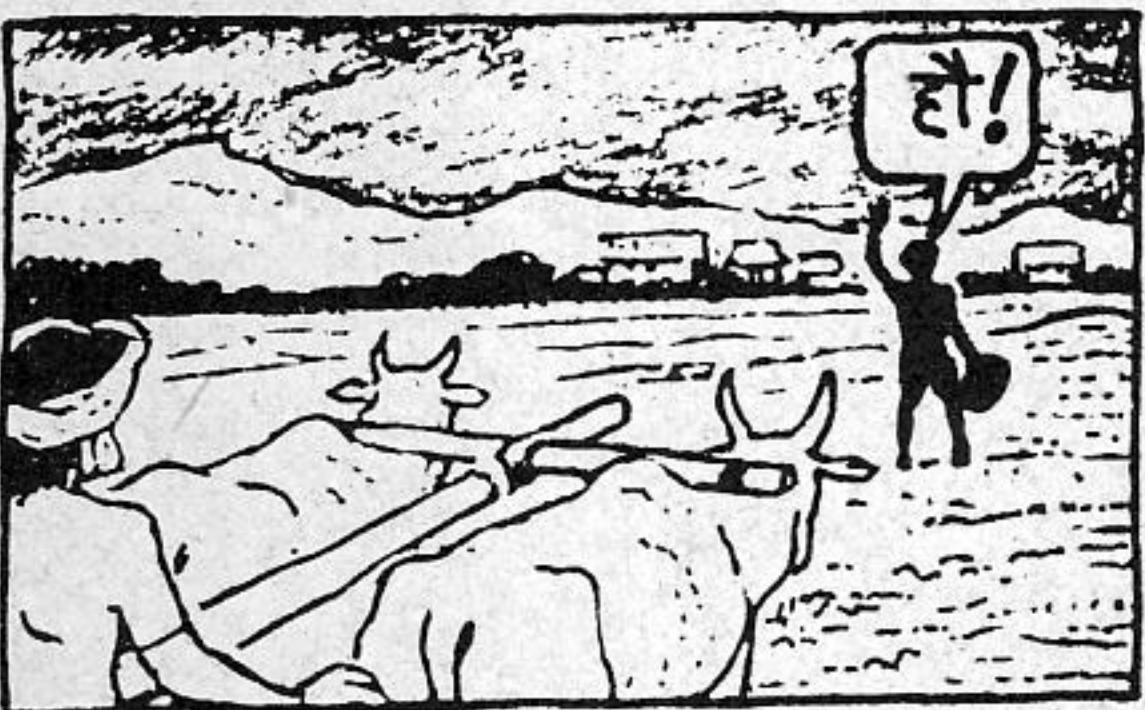
Er...if you could put in a word to the ACP, since you know him personally...

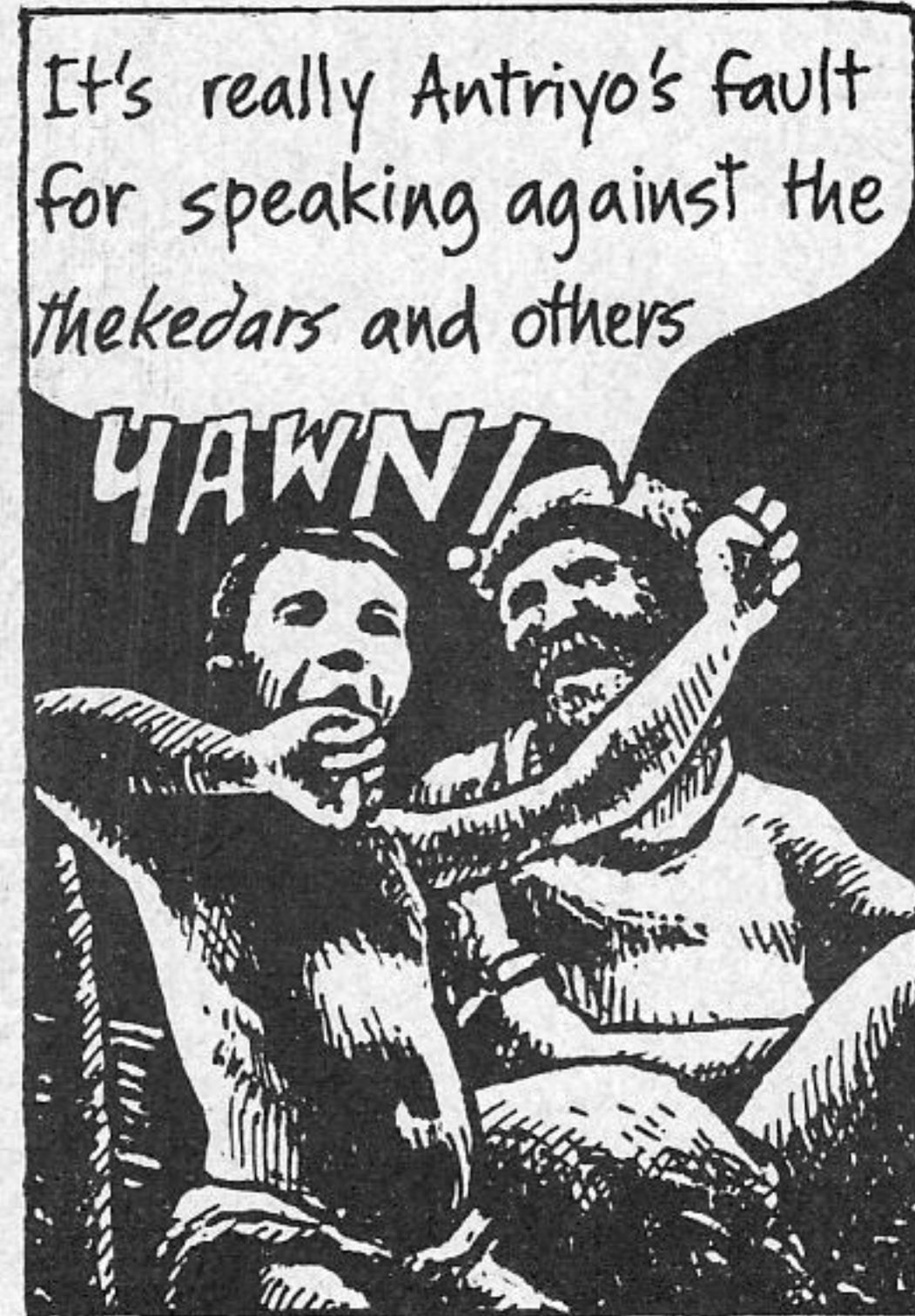
Of course!



Ha Ha Ha! What shall I tell him? That you did your job, as an officer of the law? Ha Ha!







No one knew how the fire started. The police made a report saying it was an accident.



The whole village knew it was done by Rathore, but there was no proof. Then uncle Maaru died in hospital...



... And we were forced to give away all our land in payment for uncle's debts.



Strange, isn't it? You've been working here for years, but I'd never have known that you've been through so much.

But tell me... Maaru's debt couldn't have been THAT big!



It was Rathore's word against ours. And he showed his accounts to the adhikaris.



I will never forget that time, Vishnubhai. One day, we were happy cultivating our own land...



... living in a house my father and uncles had built with their own hands



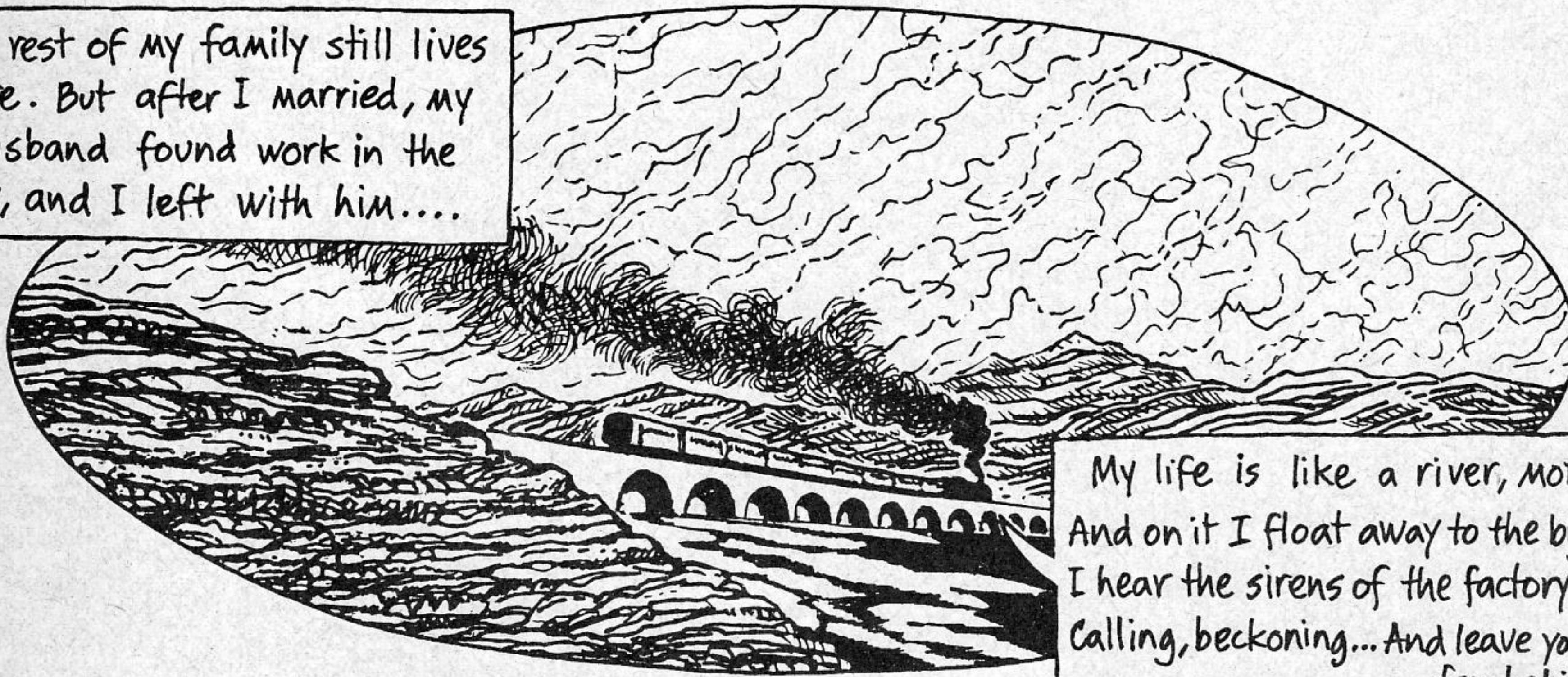
And the next day we were on the way to Ballapur to work as landless labourers



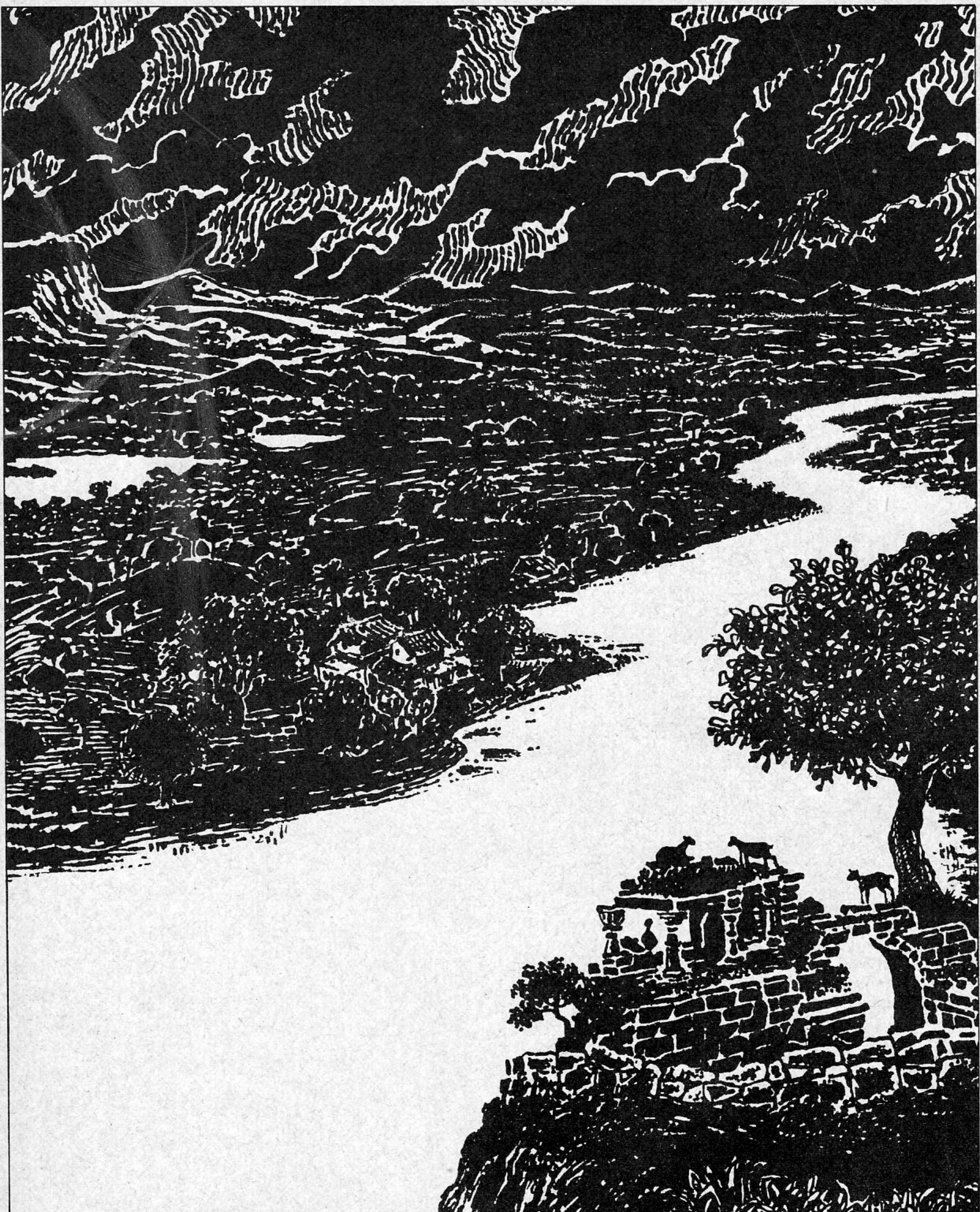
With no money or possessions



The rest of my family still lives there. But after I married, my husband found work in the city, and I left with him....



My life is like a river, mother
And on it I float away to the big city
I hear the sirens of the factory, father
Calling, beckoning... And leave your world
far behind...



Part II : THE RIVER

THE MOUNTAINS WERE CHANGING...

I came to the mountains. Tigers and bears were roaring. Ranikajal was crying, 'Now what do I do?'

She called Ratukamai, 'Devur! devur! Our mountain is changing. What should we do?' Said Ratukamai, 'We should go to the maal and get the singer Malgu.'

So who went? Ratukamai did. Went and caught the king's horse and took the path to Malapur. Reached and called, 'Dada! Dada!'

Malgu gayan sleeps for twelve years and snores for thirteen. He awoke with a start, 'Dada,' he said. 'What brings you here?'

Said Ratukamai, 'Our task is big. Our mountain is changing... Tigers and bears are roaring. So I have come to take you.'

Replied Malgu gayan, 'Go now. I will come after four-five days.'

